

EXPLORATIONS IN ETHNIC STUDIES



Explorations in Ethnic Studies is an interdisciplinary journal devoted to the study of ethnicity, ethnic groups, intergroup relations, and the cultural life of ethnic minorities. The editorial staff welcomes manuscripts that are in concert with the objectives and goals of the National Association for Interdisciplinary Ethnic Studies. Contributors should demonstrate the integration of theory and practice.

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Ethnicity and Empowerment: Implications for Psychological Training in the 1980s

Linda M.C. Abbott

Psychological services, as a part of the health-care system, have been "embedded in specific configurations of cultural meanings and social relationships,"¹ and the role of patients and healers cannot be understood apart from that context. This article explores the failure of psychology to effectively address the inhibiting impact of racism on human development, and it suggests a corrective agenda for the training of socially responsive and responsible psychologists, an agenda derived from the literacy education model of Paulo Freire.

Literacy enables people to participate in the political culture, while illiteracy ensures their marginality. The Brazilian educator Paulo Freire conceived the problem of adult illiteracy as a political phenomenon. His experience in adult education and his insight into the political dimension of the acts of reading and writing led him to develop a process through which adults gained the ability to read in just thirty to forty hours of training.² Fundamental to this success is the development of an awareness within the learner that he or she is a subject capable of acting in history, not just an object of inevitable historical forces and processes. Freire's instruction to a coordinator of a "cultural circle," the learning group, exemplifies this understanding:

In order to be able to be a good coordinator for a "cultural circle," you need, above all, to have faith in man, to believe in his possibility to create, to change things. You need to love. You must be convinced that the fundamental effort of education is the liberation of man, and never his "domestication." You must be convinced that this liberation takes place to the extent that a

man reflects upon himself and his relationship to the world in which, and with which, he lives. And that it takes place to the extent that, in "conscientizing" himself, he inserts himself in history as a subject.³

The role of the coordinator, then, is to facilitate the psychological transformation of the learner. In the process of learning to read, students learn to act, to exercise a new degree of control over the circumstances of their lives.

Freire's conceptualization of the self emerging as an actor in history, with newly realized individual goals and aims, is an apt characterization of the process of emerging self-determination among ethnic groups in America in recent years. In 1967, Carmichael and Hamilton described this psychological process as basic to the Black Revolution.

Throughout the country, vast segments of the black communities are beginning to reclaim their history, their culture; to create their own sense of community and togetherness... When we begin to define our own image... the Black community will have a positive image of itself that it has created.⁴

No individual or ethnic group can proceed along the developmental path of growth in self-esteem without some degree of cultural support. In Freire's scheme, the coordinator provides guidance and reinforcement to the learner as the struggle for mastery, and its corollary, self-esteem, takes place. In contemporary American culture, the task of engendering individual growth in self-awareness and self-esteem is guided by the collective wisdom of psychology. However, the record of psychological practice in assisting, supporting, and enabling minority clients to achieve this positive identity has been less than impressive. In the traditional psychological orientation, as in the traditional educational system Freire attacked so effectively, individuals were led to believe in the inevitability of current social reality. They were then molded to conform to that reality, manipulated as objects toward the fulfillment of their predetermined role. As Freire's analysis of education showed that it could not be neutral, but must be either oppressing or liberating, so it is with psychological services. Either the client becomes "adjusted" to the oppressive society in which the problems arose, or that client is enabled to transform social reality in a new, more liberating direction.

The psychological profession's liberal self-image has served to camouflage its dismal record in alleviating human suffering among significant portions of the population. Psychologists believe themselves to be participants in a universally applicable process, relating to the essential humanity in each client. However, despite the mental health profession's firm public avowal of the dignity and worth of all human beings, these professionals have taken a back seat in the cause of improving social reality and mental health for multiethnic populations. From within the field a few voices have protested this failure: "social scientists have played little or no role in disclosing the truth about the plight of minorities in the United States,"⁵ and, in a more general comment on this issue, "psychologists have not been the pacesetters of history."⁶

The chorus of criticism has grown since the 1960s to include socially conscious observers of the field, along with a fair number of dissatisfied consumers who join the continued critiques from within. Traditional counseling practices have been condemned as being "demeaning, irrelevant, and oppressive toward the culturally different. Admonitions to develop new methods, concepts, and services more appropriate to the life experiences of minority clients have been plentiful."⁷ S.J. Korchin also finds that "psychology has not been sufficiently concerned with racism and mental health, whether in theory or research, in clinical practice, or in graduate education."⁸ Korchin's analysis indicates that minority mental health needs are largely unmet, and where intervention does take place, its quality is below that which is available to whites. Dissatisfaction with these second-rate services is shown by several indicators, including a high nonreturn rate for clients who are ethnically different from their counselors. Other, more radical critics condemn all psychological intervention for minority clients as ill-conceived "rescue" attempts predicated on racist assumptions about the clients' inadequacies for participating in their own problem-solving.

Although factors contributing to this insensitivity and blindness are numerous and subtle, probably the major blame can be appropriately attributed to the educational system which produced culture bound psychologists. That guilt is found both in what is taught and in what is not taught. As products of a racist educational system, psychologists are frequently simply ignorant of the effect of institutional racism in differently structuring the life style and motivational patterns of different ethnic groups.

Ethnocentrism is part of the explanation as well as ignorance, for in

a profession where ninety-eight percent of the practitioners are white the multicultural question rarely even arises. When it does, it is likely to be from the "psychology of race differences" perspective, where all others are compared, usually unfavorably, to the white male, who is taken as the norm. Because of the conceptual limitations imposed by ignorance and ethnocentrism, the value differences inhibiting the effectiveness of psychological intervention are rarely even recognized: "It is the conceit of most mental health professionals that their theories and techniques are equally applicable across cultures."⁹

Training orientations further limit the conceptual flexibility essential to serving clients of diverse ethnic backgrounds. In a discussion of the avoidance of sociocultural factors in research on client-counselor interaction patterns where minority clients are involved, W. Banks indicates that "the individualistic orientation of most therapists and counselors . . . in effect minimizes the importance of very real psychosocial factors operating on the Black client."¹⁰ Other reviewers find a similar limitation in the record of therapeutic work with Hispanic clients; the focus on intrapsychic factors diverts attention from environmental factors contributing to the problem.¹¹ In his review of Ramon Salcido's paper documenting social workers' ineffectiveness in meeting needs of Mexican Americans, Cliff Hooper underlines the role of the educational system in predetermining that failure. In a comment on the absence of culturally relevant materials in social work curricula, a comment as readily applied to training models for psychologists, Hooper asks "Where would the American social worker receive [this needed] kind of training?"¹² The focus in training is clearly on an internal, rather than external, causation of problems in living. Not only is the training orientation of most psychologists skewed toward an emphasis on intrapsychic factors but it is focused on pathology. This professional training model, dominant from Freud's time, is analogous to the medical model in that the client (now referred to as a patient) is seen as suffering from a disorder which can best be remedied through passive compliance with the treatment prescribed by the therapist. External social reality is largely irrelevant in such a conceptualization.

The theoretical orientation creates for the patient a situation Freire would consider colonial, oppressive in the extreme. Like the oppressive educational structures he set out to replace, the psychological enterprise appears to exist to integrate the oppressed into the *status quo*; to foster, in other words, adjustment.

The advocacy of adjustment as a solution to problems supports the

status quo and discourages any real questioning of society's entrenched institutions. It perpetuates inequity and creates a situation where "the oppressed have been alienated from their own decision making and have been convinced of their intrinsic inferiority."¹³ The effect of this mode of psychological intervention is to solidify unconscious restricting shackles instead of facilitating their removal.

Rather than play a role in the perpetuation of oppression, psychologists could select the alternative role posed by Freire for educators, that of an agent of liberation. By espousing the belief that people are "basically free to alter the present and structure the future,"¹⁴ psychologists can enter into a dialogue with clients about the reality of their lives. The goal would become empowerment, rather than adjustment; clients would develop confidence in their ability to act in history, to alter the circumstances of their lives. Political scientists refer to the notion of control over one's fate as *political efficacy*;¹⁵ psychologists refer to it as *mastery*, and it is a hallmark of the healthy individual.

A movement for developing alternative professional models that include among their goals the empowerment of clients would be evidence of rejection of the oppressive assumptions of the traditional training model. Twice in recent history trends in American psychology have demonstrated the existence of a liberating intent. In the 1960s the Radical Therapy movement emerged with the motto "therapy is change, not adjustment."¹⁶ Radical therapists trained a number of paraprofessionals in the art of soul-healing, conceived as a political activity. In this understanding, "therapy is social learning; the awakening of political consciousness . . . it is not an intra-psychic exploration."¹⁷

By rejecting altogether the techniques and theoretical basis of traditional psychological practice, Radical Therapy alienated numerous psychologists. Although it brought to general awareness issues of social relevance, it did not succeed in transforming American psychology. Like other Leftist movements, Radical Therapy suffered from political infighting and from fragmentation into competing splinter groups. Its eager expectation of massive social change left persons with immediate and urgent mental health problems devoid of appropriate treatment and comfort. Political action was substituted for therapeutic intervention. The strident criticism of "the system" by Radical Therapists did serve as an effective spur to new research which documented the relationship between social conditions and mental illness, bringing attention to the importance of economic factors in stress. This information led to a more compassionate understanding of

the situation of clients in lower socioeconomic brackets and the impact of the data aroused a number of psychologists to a position of advocacy.

Some of the advocates became leaders in the second liberating trend, that of the Community Mental Health Movement initiated by legislation in 1973. Ethnic activists had demanded a more decentralized, responsive, and proactive mental health delivery system. Although still viable and the focus of much expectation, the movement's impact has been restricted by several factors. There is often an impression of a second-rate service, providing less expertise and demonstrating less concern for the comfort of the client than more traditional settings."¹⁸ Often the medical model is prevalent in these settings, leading to an emphasis on pathology, rather than on support and extension of the client's natural strengths and coping skills. Even more inhibiting to the effectiveness of the Community Mental Health Movement, however, is the excessively rigid bureaucratization with which it has been plagued since its inception. Its impersonal, complex structures have notoriously little relevance to the cultural lifestyle of the people the agencies are designed to serve.

A re-evaluation of individual agencies by their surrounding client communities may correct some of these deficits in order to promote the development of more responsive and locally determined strategies for service. J. Giordano and others suggest that such strategies are most effective when developed by multiethnic coalitions in recognition of a multi-group reality.

The two historical trends in psychological services, the politically radical advocacy strategy of the 1960s and the agency centered coalitional strategy of the 1970s, have been partly effective in increasing the awareness of and responsiveness to the interests of client from diverse ethnic groups and to concerns of the culturally aware mental health professional. The educational model of Paulo Freire suggests a third strategy, one of empowerment, which would extend the effectiveness and impact of these strategies in a manner consistent with the needs of the contemporary situation.

As in the "cultural circles" developed by Freire, psychologists in a therapeutic setting designed to empower the client would adopt the role of resource coordinator, rather than that of teacher or doctor. Clients are assumed to be more knowledgeable about their cultural heritage and life circumstances, while the therapist is assumed to be more knowledgeable regarding models of mental health and strategies for attaining full functioning. Together the therapist and client engage in a discussion of what would constitute a helpful intervention, agree upon

mutual goals, and engage in a contractual relationship. Provision is made for involving others in the process as desired by both parties, and evaluation is regular and mutual. At all times, the paramount objective is for clients to gain a greater sense of mastery over their fate. "Homework" exercises are designed to test and expand the growing sense of self.

The empowerment model varies in significant aspects from that in which therapists are currently trained. It presupposes the availability of information regarding mental health needs of society's component racial, gender, religious, and cultural groups. In recent years, information of that nature has been forthcoming from a variety of credible sources. The early caution against racial bias in psychological training and practice raised by such authors as L.H. Gardner²⁰ has been followed by a flood of information regarding the importance of cultural differences in the area of mental health.²¹ High quality materials presently exist with which to supplement reading lists in every course in psychological training programs with materials relevant to a multicultural client population.

Supplemental bibliographies are currently available for use in core training curricula. One of the better lists focuses on the Hispanic population: Amado Padilla and Paul Aranda's *Latino Mental Health*²² is amply annotated and provides a subject index. Affirmative action officers and ethnic studies faculty can bring these resources to the attention of the appropriate department faculty.

Realistically, however, not all faculty are motivated to use these resources. For students, the most practical supplemental training for service to a multicultural population is probably in the form of brief seminars, institutes, and conferences. Several campuses of the California School of Professional Psychology have been relying on these brief training experiences while awaiting the institution-wide adoption of supplemental bibliographies in all required courses. At Fresno, recent conferences have gathered experienced mental health workers and students to consider "Issues in Hispanic Mental Health," and "Issues in Asian Mental Health." In San Diego, a 1983 conference explored "Ethnic Issues in Psychotherapy" with a blue-ribbon panel. Conference Proceedings are made available and media coverage is encouraged as a further extension of the impact of these gatherings. On-going evaluation gathers student perspectives on the preparation they are receiving for work with multiethnic populations. As crucial as it is to acquire knowledge of the history, culture, and understanding of mental health of diverse groups, it is insufficient to simply add

information to the existing training program. Major changes in the curriculum are required if therapists are to be able to implement that new knowledge with understanding and skill.²³

Curricular changes must be supplemented with practica and internship opportunities which will enable students to apply knowledge of the dynamics of cultural factors within a context of shared authority and mutual respect. Faculty will need to abandon its hierarchical source of authority in order to model the democratic decision process of the empowerment model. Alternative styles of explanation of mental health and illness must be explored drawing upon the rich metaphysical heritage of a panoply of cultural groups. The test of all curricular materials would become their contribution to a panhuman understanding of psychological health and illness which recognizes the variation introduced by significant cultural factors.

In such a training program, the empowerment model would require that all participants' potential contributions to the educational experience be recognized. The experience and information brought to the encounter by students serves as a valid context for continual refinement and updating of the knowledge base of the faculty. As recruitment efforts bring more representatives of various cultures to the training program as both students and faculty, the educational interchange becomes immeasurably enriched. Outreach programs such as continuing education seminars and panels for alumni and community professionals would multiply the effect of the curriculum change.

Entrenched faculty have little motivation, other than on moral grounds, for introducing such a restructuring of graduate training programs. Those who maintain private practices are well aware that current reward systems encourage continued emphasis on providing psychological services to the affluent, largely white sector.

Along with continual visibility of the moral rationale for the development of services which empower those whom social structures now exploit, pressure for curricular restructuring and for intensive recruitment of Afroamerican, Amerasian, American Indian, and Hispanic faculty and students must come from accrediting agencies, both regional and professional, and from institutional governing boards. Staff and site visitors of regional accrediting associations should be supplied with information designed to assist them in evaluating programs on grounds of cultural relevance. For example, a checklist by which dissertation research can be reviewed for racism or sexist bias might be included in such an information packet. Similarly, the American Psychological Association can be encouraged to remind

programs it accredits of the Vail Conference's recommendation to psychological service agencies that they "employ competent persons, or . . . provide continuing education for the present staff to meet the service needs of the culturally diverse population it serves."²⁴ Educational institutions are remarkably responsive to the viewpoint of professional accrediting associations. Organizations and individuals concerned with the cultural relevance of psychological practice would do well to mount a systematic lobbying effort within the association.

A third recommended point of pressure is that of public governing and advisory boards. A well orchestrated effort to bring multi-cultural concerns to the attention of these public members would pay dividends in the inclusion of those concerns in institutional planning. Trustees, overseers, and community advisory board members, when properly informed, can be influential advocates as the institution seeks funding for programs focused on multiethnic issues. Their presence at site visits, for example, can emphasize the level of community support for the institution's proposed multicultural training program or service provision. Funding agencies are highly responsive to this evidence of broad, unselfish backing.

Finally, third party payment structures for psychological services are yet another point at which to address the proficiency of current practitioners in working with culturally diverse clients. Insurers and other third parties often require an evaluation of the service; interested parties could encourage practitioner evaluation along culturally relevant empowerment dimensions.

The strategies enumerated here, taken together, could measurably impact the training of new psychologists. The empowerment model, in conjunction with advocacy for clients and coalition strategies used with current practitioner agencies, would be useful in enabling psychology to fulfill its promise of facilitating full human development. The current accomplishment, of enabling a partial development of an ethnically defined part of the population, has been accepted for too long as the most that could be done. Freire's education for efficacy and its psychological corollary, the empowerment model, reveals the cultural source of that limited vision, and so enables concerned individuals and organizations to act for change.

Notes

- ¹A. Kleinmen. *Patients and Healers in the Context of Culture*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980) 25.
- ²C. Brown. "Literacy in 30 Hours: Paulo Freire's Process in Northeast Brazil." *Social Policy*. Vol. 5, No. 2 (July, 1974) 25.
- ³P. Freire. "To the Coordinator of a Cultural Circle." *Convergence*. Vol. 4, No. 1 (1st quarter, 1971) 61-61.
- ⁴S. Carmichael and C.V. Hamilton. *Black Power, the Politics of Liberation in America*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1967) 37.
- ⁵D.W. Sue. *Counseling the Culturally Different: Theory and Practice*. (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1981) 141.
- ⁶C.W. Thomas. "Psychologists, Psychology, and the Black Community." *Black Psychology*. R.I. Jones, ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1972) 376.
- ⁷Sue, xi.
- ⁸S.J. Korchin. "Clinical Psychology and Minority Problems." *American Psychology*. Vol. 35, No. 3 (March, 1980) 262.
- ⁹J. Giordano and G.P. Giordano. *The Ethno-Cultural Factor in Mental Health: A Literature Review and Bibliography*. (New York: Institute on Plural and Group Identity of the American Jewish Committee, 1977) 10.
- ¹⁰W. Banks, "The Black Client and the Helping Professionals." *Black Psychology*. R.I. Jones, ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1972) 205.
- ¹¹S.E. Keefe and J.M. Casas. "Mexican Americans and Mental Health, A Selected Review and Recommendation for Mental Health Service Delivery." *American Journal of Community Psychology*. Vol. 8, No. 3 (June, 1980) 303-325.
- ¹²C.I. Hooper. "Critique of 'A Proposed Model for Advocacy Services for Mexican Undocumented Aliens with Mental Health Needs.'" *Explorations in Ethnic Studies*. Vol. 4, No. 2 (July, 1981) 66.
- ¹³G.J. Conti. "Rebels with a Cause: Jules Horton and Paulo Freire." *Community College Review*. Vol. 5, No. 1 (Summer, 1977) 39.
- ¹⁴T.M. Bringham. "Liberation in Social Work Education: Applications from Paulo Freire." *Journal of Education for Social Work*. Vol. 13, No. 3 (Fall, 1977) 6.
- ¹⁵B.C. Freeman. "Power, Patriarchy, and 'Political Primitives.'" *Beyond Intellectual Sexism: A New Woman, A New Reality*. J.L. Roberts, ed. (New York: D. McKay Co. Inc., 1966) 243.
- ¹⁶N. Hurvitz. "The Status and Tasks of Radical Therapy." *Psychotherapy Theory, Research, and Practice*. Vol. 14, No. 1 (Spring, 1977) 65-73.
- ¹⁷J. Sayre. "Radical Therapy: A Challenge to Psychiatry." *Perspectives in Psychiatric Care*. Vol. 12, No. 1 (Jan-Feb, 1974) 27-28.
- ¹⁸W.D. Pierce. "The Comprehensive Community Mental Health Programs and the Black Community." *Black Psychology*. R.I. Jones, ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1972) 398-405; See also: R.H. Weaver and H.H. Goldstein, "Interracial and Cross-Cultural Relationships." *Journal of Intergroup Relations*. Vol. 8, No. 3 (3rd quarter, 1980) 31-40.
- ¹⁹J. Giordano, ed. *International Journal of Mental Health: Group Identity and Mental Health*. Vol. 5, No. 2 (Summer, 1976); E.S. Levine and A.M. Padilla. *Crossing Cultures in Therapy: Pluralistic Counseling for the Hispanic*. (Monterey: Brooks/Cole Publishing Co., 1980); and D. Finks. *The Dynamics of Citizen Coalitions*. Working Paper Number 18. (New York: Institute of Pluralism and Group Identity, 1976).

²⁰L.H. Gardner. "The Therapeutic Relationship Under Varying Conditions of Race." *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, and Practice*. Vol. 8, No. 1 (Spring, 1971) 78-87.

²¹D.R. Atkinson, G. Morton, and D.W. Sue, *Counseling American Minorities: A Cross-Cultural Perspective*. (Dubuque, IA: W.C. Brown Co., 1979); A. Kleinman, note 1, Levine and Padilla, note 19; and D.W. Sue, note 5.

²²A.M. Padilla and P. Aranda. *Latino Mental Health: Bibliography and Abstracts*. (Rockville, MD: Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Mental Health Administration, 1974).

²³M. Korman, ed. *National Conference on Levels and Patterns of Professional Training in Psychology*. Vail, Colorado, 1973. (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 1976) 105.

Critique

Abbott's presentation should be of critical concern for educators and practitioners who prepare others to deliver psychological services to ethnic minority clients. A strong point of the article is the description of a serious problem in many educational programs which fail to adequately prepare psychologists to work among a variety of ethnic groups. Equally significant, the author provides pragmatic recommendations and strategies for addressing the concerns which emerge from a theoretical framework.

Institutional racism in educational systems for psychologists is a major factor in the failure of educational programs to create and develop curricula to teach and sensitize students to its negative effects on the life experiences of different ethnic groups. Traditional graduates do not have knowledge and skills to administer quality psychological services to multiethnic populations.

Abbott recommends curricula and related strategies for improving the education of students of psychology which uses the empowerment model. She makes a good case for the merit of the empowerment model. However, there are three observations which may be limitations to the scenario. First, the empowerment model conveys political overtones which may or may not be relevant to the life circumstances of each individual client or family. Second, it is unclear if the author is expounding a model for psychological training, a model for psychotherapy, or a model for community development or a combination of all of these. It is certainly conceivable that the basic formulation of the empowerment model may be applicable to all of them. However, one cannot be confident that the model would work as envisioned by Abbott, because the model recommended as the framework for the development of curricula from a multiethnic perspective may not cover the numerous, diverse ethnic groups. Finally, although there are

commonalities as well as differences among ethnic groups, there are even variations in lifestyles including health behaviors within *each* ethnic group among its members. To concede that this *one* model at its theoretical stage of development can be *the* model to serve as the framework for the development of curricula from a multiethnic perspective to provide the knowledge and skills to all students is difficult.

Demonstration projects using the framework and other strategies identified by Abbott would permit researchers to examine the process and outcome for students and faculty who participate in curricula which uses the empowerment model as compared to those in the traditional programs. Positive results would increase the validity of calling for the widespread use of the empowerment model to improve the psychology programs and ultimately produce professionals with the ability to provide quality services to multiethnic populations.

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Critique

The United States has a poor record in meeting the mental health needs of its minority populations. By focusing on individual pathology and relying on the white male as norm, practitioners have provided an ethnocentric and ineffective means of treating their culturally diverse clients. No longer can mental health problems be regarded only in terms of disabling mental illnesses and identified psychiatric disorders. They must also embody harm to mental health linked with perpetual poverty and unemployment and the institutionalized discrimination that happens on the basis of race or ethnicity, age, sex, social class, and mental or physical handicap. In its report, the President's Commission on Mental Health indicated that mental health services and programs must focus on the diversity of groups in U.S. society and satisfy the groups in terms of their special needs.¹

Traditionally, and from an assimilationist position, ethnic minorities have been viewed as espousing an external (*vis-à-vis* internal) focus of control (i.e., a fatalistic orientation), unable to delay gratification, and as immoral, unintelligent, and uneducable. The failure of traditional psychology in treating minority clients has resulted in the development of psychologies exclusive to particular ethnic minorities

(e.g., Chicano psychology, black psychology).² Such sociocultural psychologies have been more effective as frameworks for mental health practices and programs than traditional therapy. Moreover, a sociocultural psychology is more scientific, parsimonious, and universal than traditional white Euroamerican systems of psychology laboring under the assumption that mental health and behavior is best explained by variables within individuals.³ Under the guise of neutrality, traditional psychology intervention has been oppressing rather than liberating. For example, a major flaw in psychoanalysis is that it sometimes creates the problem that it is designed to eliminate.

Structural rather than individual factors provide the key to the etiology of mental illness for ethnic minorities. In addition to the various forms of institutionalized discrimination, unemployment, insufficient education, impoverished housing, and slum community environments are not only conducive to stress-producing circumstances but are also barricades to effective psychological services. "People who are deprived by reason of race or poverty have a higher incidence of all kinds of illness."⁴ These factors are associated with changes in the incidence and prevalence of mental illness by population categories, and must be taken into account in preventative programs. Besides racial and ethnic minorities, recent immigrants, the poor, the elderly, and women are high-risk populations for the development of mental disorders because of their exposure to extraordinary stress, their lack of opportunity for participating in the creation of knowledge and gaining a measure of control over their social environment, inadequate institutional and community supports to sustain them during periods of difficulty, and pressures resulting from contradictory role expectations.

Mental health needs vary by cultural groups and by one's position relative to others in society. Each ethnic minority category has a unique narrative, a particular status within society, and specific patterns of adaptation and accommodation regarding society. One cannot assume that effective mental health practices for majority groups will be sufficient for minority groups.

Mental health is a community concern and cannot be restricted to the expertise of professionals. Community groups are useful support systems for individuals who need to eliminate their self-doubts and misery and rebuild their confidence, composure, and faith. They help people who, for whatever reason, do not seem to benefit from "official" therapy. Through interaction with others with similar problems, community support groups provide individuals with new insights and

relationships and perhaps a more objective view of themselves. In the field of mental health, professional expertise is not conclusive unless it embodies the experiences and practical knowledge of consumers of services.⁵ Group therapy is appropriately based on the wealth of data which show family strife as a serious threat to the mental well being of its members. Family therapy can be an efficacious preventative measure for potentially explosive, violent home environments.

Primary responsibility for the insensitivity of mental health services to minority clients can be placed on our educational institution. Training programs should include bilingual instructors with a thorough awareness of diverse segments of our population. Minority clients tend to trust agencies with therapists who identify with their group. Clearly, the presence of people like oneself contributes to trust. The President's Commission on Mental Health has recommended that advocacy teams for the representation of the mentally ill be established and that each state constitute a "Bill of Rights" for all mentally disabled persons.⁶ The Commission also called for erasing discrimination against mental disability in present Medicaid and Medicare laws and recommended that any future national health insurance program not sever mental illness from the scope of its objectives.⁷

The empowerment model is needed to furnish a back-drop for a radical change in our nation's mental health care. As Abbott suggested, perhaps the major goal of mental health treatment is for clients to gain a greater sense of mastery over their fate—a formidable task, especially when a national commission could impart doubt about whether depression and paranoia were abnormal when found among individuals who reside in barrios and ghettos.⁸ The President's Commission recognized that paranoia and depression were severely detrimental to the mental well being of Chicanos and blacks as well as other minorities and poor whites and emphasized that no one should experience such adverse conditions requiring such adaptations.⁹ The voices of minorities must be heard for the nation's benefit.

Anthony J. Cortese
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Notes

¹President's Commission on Mental Health. *The Report to the President*. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1978).

²J. Martinez, Jr., ed. *Chicano Psychology*. (New York: Academic Press, 1977). R.I. Jones, ed. *Black Psychology*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).

³R. Diaz-Guerrero. 1977. "A Sociocultural Psychology." pp. 17-27 in J. J.L. Martinez, Jr., ed. *Chicano Psychology*. (New York: Academic Press, 1977) 17-27.

⁴Jack R. Ewalt. "The Birth of the Community Mental Health Movement." *An Assessment of the Mental Health Movement*. Walter Barton, ed. (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1977) 18.

⁵Charles V. Willie. "The President's Commission on Mental Health—A Minority Report on Minorities." *New England Sociologist*. Vol. 1 (Fall, 1978) 13-22.

⁶President's Commission on Mental Health.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Joint Commission on Mental Illness and Health. *Action for Mental Health*. (New York: Wiley, 1961).

⁹President's Commission on Mental Health.

Women, Religion, and Peace in an American Indian Ritual

Kristin Herzog

I will tell you something about stories,
[he said]
They aren't just entertainment.
Don't be fooled.
They are all we have, you see,
all we have to fight off
illness and death.

You don't have anything
if you don't have the stories.

Their evil is mighty
but it can't stand up to our stories.
So they try to destroy the stories
let the stories be confused or forgotten.
They would like that
They would be happy
Because we would be defenseless then.

He rubbed his belly.
I keep them here
[he said]
Here, put your hand on it
See, it is moving.
There is life here
for the people.

And in the belly of this story
the rituals and the ceremony
are still growing.

The poem prefaces Leslie Marmon Silko's novel *Ceremony*, the story of a young American Indian who regains the wholeness and meaning of his life by rediscovering his ancient tribal roots and rituals.¹ It is a story of the American Southwest, especially the Pueblo-

Laguna people. Anyone even vaguely familiar with American Indian culture knows that the groups were originally as different from each other as modern-day Swedes are from Albanians or Catalans, if not more so. There were more than 2,000 independent culture groups in Columbus's time, and they spoke 500 different languages belonging to fifty distinct language groups, some as different from each other as Chinese and English.² It was the primitivity of white thought which lumped all the groups together under the absurd term of "Indians." Hundreds of years of forced acculturation have not erased the most essential distinctions among them.

There is something, however, that many of the more than 300 culture groups surviving today have in common: they have been able to retain or rediscover their ancient beliefs and practices to an extent remarkable in view of the pressures to assimilate a Euroamerican worldview. Their traditions were not "primitive," but sometimes involved highly sophisticated thought systems, developed long before Columbus's time. Westerners have largely disregarded them because they equated culture with literacy, even though Europeans knew from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, not to speak of the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, that oral traditions can be unsurpassed in terms of aesthetic or religious quality.

This article concentrates on the Dekanawida-Hayonwatha materials, a narrative and a ritual of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) which have been current among them for at least four centuries. The reason for this cultural survival is undoubtedly to be found in what Leslie Silko imagines as "life . . . for the people . . . in the belly of his story" where "the rituals and the ceremony are still growing." The story told by the materials is especially enlightening for our time on three points: (1) the high status of women in Haudenosaunee society and the "feminine principle" incorporated in their politics; (2) the understanding of statecraft as sacred responsibility toward all of creation, and (3) their understanding of peace as justice and wholeness in the social order, built on subtle psychological insights.

The epic of Dekanawida, a mythical story about an historical Iroquois lawgiver, dating back to about the fifteenth century, forms the basis of a whole body of ritual literature. Closely related to or even woven into the narrative is the Great Law, outlining all the rules of Iroquois League politics and rites. Both of these culminate in the Condolence Ritual, which proscribes the forms of mourning for a deceased high chief and his symbolic resurrection in the successor.³ The three texts exist in various complete or fragmentary versions,

some in print and some in manuscript form. In the beginning they had been handed down orally with the aid of pictographs and mnemonic strands of wampum— shells or beads used for concrete evidence of treaties and for symbolizing and memorizing the tribal tradition. From the 1770s on native ritualists had begun writing the rituals down with the help of an orthography borrowed from missionaries, and from the 1880s on they were written down in English.⁴

Dekanawida and Hayonwatha (Hiawatha) were probably two distinct beings in the original narrative, but in some legends they have become fused over the centuries into a single folk hero with the attributes of a demigod. Longfellow's *Hiawatha* confuses the historical Haudenosaunee lawgiver with a demigod of the Ojibway. The main versions of the narrative agree that Dekanawida was a prophet and a mystic born of a poor virgin mother among the Hurons, that he had miraculous powers and through a vision felt compelled to end the continuous fighting between neighboring groups. They also agree that Hayonwatha, an Onondaga who had experienced serious bereavement, became the disciple of Dekanawida and the practical organizer of the League which comprised the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca. The third most important character in the narrative is an evil man, Thadodahho, an Onondaga tyrant and cannibal, crippled and snake-haired on the outside, malicious and perverse inside, who eventually is healed and converted and becomes the "Fire-Keeper"—a kind of president and keeper of the sacred wampum—of the League's Council.

Since the narrative, the related laws, and the Condolence Ritual are designed to overcome personal grief as well as hostility among the various nations, the whole body of literature can be understood as the record of a revitalization movement among several groups.⁵ It is difficult, however, to trace the historical core of the process. The origin of the League is dated by the Haudenosaunee chiefs around 1390, by white scholars about 1570. White people probably did not know about it until 1640. But during the following centuries the League impressed and influenced people as diverse as Benjamin Franklin and Karl Marx, and it was one of the models on which the Constitution of the United States was based. Some of its principles resemble those of the United Nations.⁶

The prevailing symbolic value of Haudenosaunee world-view and the survival of their rituals should not, however, blind us to the fact that Dekanawida's vision has been embodied in terms of the Great League of Peace for only a limited time or in broken and sporadic

ways. New stereotypes are as bad as old ones, and the point is not to picture an ideal social system but to get a better perspective on Western tradition by observing the strengths and weaknesses of a completely different social order.

All written versions of the epic available today developed during a time of political upheaval. After 1880 the hereditary chiefs of the Haudenosaunee (Six Nations) found themselves under intense pressure to give way to democratically elected chiefs whose offices were based on merit instead of lineage. To conservative Haudenosaunee, this change threatened the complete breakup of their tradition, and it was in response to this threat that the leaders, with the help of white ethnologists, began to codify their oral tradition into written dialects as well as into English in order to give authority to their government. Naturally, these nineteenth-century records of an ancient tradition contained some "feedback" of contemporary rights and fights, uses and abuses, which may have little connection with the actual historical beginnings.⁷ However, even to speculate that the Great Peace of the Haudenosaunee may some day turn out to be "a magnificent ethnological fiction that is never quite replicated during three hundred years of known Iroquois history,"⁸ does not invalidate its meaning. If Jewish or Christian believers discover that the Exodus or the ideal loving and sharing among the first Christians are supported only by thin threads of historical evidence, that discovery does not necessarily weaken their faith in the power and truth of their tradition. It is the same with the Haudenosaunee "bible," which is the epic of Dekanawida and the Great League. Whatever the origins, the prevailing tradition itself is an historical datum.

There is another parallel between the Haudenosaunee epic and the Jewish and Christian Scriptures: it is senseless to search for the "best" or "most accurate" version. There are only versions which excel in some aspect: in the beauty of mythological imagery, in political detail, narrative coherence, or the use of material which can be considered of ancient origin. The versions known publicly are here treated as a composite; occasionally the notes will indicate the "synoptic" differences.⁹

The narrative is replete with mystical elements. The prophet's power is seen as supernatural from his birth. The child survives some drowning attempts of the grandmother, who does not understand his virgin birth until a messenger tells her in a vision that this is a special child who will bring peace to the nations (14).¹⁰ As a young man Dekanawida performs some miracles to prove he will be able to bring

the peace he prophesied (16,73). But he is also the intelligent, charismatic human leader: He knows the right moment and the right approach for winning over one chief and one group after the other for the Great League. The aim of his mission is not only the ending of the intense warfare but also the overcoming of cannibalism and senseless blood feuds which decimated whole clans. The death cult was to be transformed into a life-affirming order of society.¹¹ The prophet's genius lies not in mere political diplomacy but in laying bare and healing the hidden psychological causes of private and public hostility. He also realizes that wholeness and peace will not prevail without women's full participation in the political process. Peace for him is the embodiment of law and justice between men and women, clans and nations, deriving power not only from their political union but from their common source of divine creation.

Dekanawida's power is exemplified in the story by various conversions. One concerns Hayonwatha, who is cured by the prophet from his cannibalistic appetite as well as from intense grief and depression. Another one relates to Thadodahho, the snake-haired Onondaga tyrant.¹² Merged with these is the story of a converted woman, Jikonsahseh, who is later known as the "Peace Queen" or "Mother of Nations." We have to consider these various conversions to understand the basic human transformation that is implied in Dekanawida's Karihwiyo—"the Good Tidings of Peace and Power" (71).

Hayonwatha before his conversion is portrayed at a moment when he carries human flesh to a kettle on his fire. He does not realize that Dekanawida is watching him from a smoke hole in the roof, just above the fire. When Hayonwatha bends over the kettle and suddenly sees Dekanawida's face reflected in the water instead of his own, he is so intensely struck by the power of this image that he reconsiders his way of life. Dekanawida speaks to him about the Good News and wins him over to become his co-worker. Hayonwatha's first assignment is to bring the Good News to Thadodahho, who belongs to his own people, the Onondaga. But the perverse wizard, who kills anybody approaching him uninvited and whose hate is only surpassed by his fear, does not accept the message of peace. Moreover, Hayonwatha seems to have fallen under his evil spell, because his three daughters suddenly fall ill and die. Soon thereafter a terrible accident causes the death of Hayonwatha's wife.¹³ He is now so overcome with grief that he "splits the sky" (strikes southward) to begin a long wandering in the wilderness, trying to ease his wounded soul. When he rests at night beside his fire, he picks up shells from the lake shore, threads them on

strings of jointed rushes and meditates: if I would find anybody as burdened with grief as I am, I would take these shell strings and turn each one of them into comforting words; the shells would signify the truth of my words. When he repeats these phrases one night after having approached a Mohawk village, Dekanawida overhears him, takes his strings of wampum and does exactly what Hayonwatha had envisioned: he uses shell by shell and string by string to speak the words of comfort which restore the sanity of mind to the bereaved man. The narrative functions here as projection and interpretation of a ritual, because Dekanawida's words are the words which to this day are used in the Requickenning Address, a part of the Condolence Ritual, comforting the nations mourning the loss of a chief: "Now, we wipe away the tears from thy face" — "Now, then, we beautify again the sky for you" — "Now, we attach the Sun again in its place for thee" (B131, B151f.).

After Hayonwatha has thus been restored to sanity, he is able to cooperate with Dekanawida in winning over the Oneidas, the Cayugas, and the Senecas to join the Great Peace. The Mohawks had been persuaded earlier to accept the Good News of Peace and Power by observing one of Dekanawida's miracles. Even the Onondaga chiefs are drawn to the League—except for Thadodahho. Dekanawida and Hayonwatha, therefore, combine their powers to bring about the transformation of the pervert.¹⁴ At this point the narrative takes on an eschatological tension. Thadodahho repeatedly utters a cry of either defiance, fear, or eager expectation: "A-son-keh-ne-eh" (it is not yet, or, it has not yet occurred [79,87]). He is still evil enough to trouble the waters of the lake which Dekanawida and all the other chiefs are trying to cross. But the bearer of peace can calm the waves (89). Finally the whole group is able to cross the water in their canoes and to march up to the wizard's house. The chiefs are beginning to sing the great peace hymn, intending to cure the tyrant through their song:

I come again to greet and thank the League

But Thadodahho's mind remains unaffected by their singing, since they hesitate and make mistakes in their ritual song.¹⁵ It is only when Dekanawida sings the hymn flawlessly and, approaching the ugly cripple without hesitation, touches his body, that the mind of Thadodahho is made sane. Being overwhelmed by Dekanawida's message and touch as well as by the chiefs' willingness to submit to the converted man's authority, Thadodahho has been won over. Even his body is straightened and strengthened, as Dekanawida tells the chiefs: "We have now accomplished our work and completed every-

thing that was required with the exception of shaping and transforming him (by rubbing him down), removing the snake-like hair from him and circumcising him” (91).¹⁶ The chiefs then take their turn in “rubbing down” Thadodahho, a gesture of intense comforting and healing.

Thadodahho’s installation as Fire-Keeper for the Great League cannot take place before a woman is present to confirm his authority. She is Jikonsahseh, “this great woman our mother” (91) who has undergone a conversion of her own. She had not been practicing cannibalism, murder, or warfare, but she had upheld the status quo by feeding “men of bloodthirsty and destructive nature” passing by her house “on their war expeditions” (71). Early in his mission Dekanawida visits her and explains to her the damaging nature of her generosity. “I shall, therefore, now change your disposition and practice . . . I now charge you that you shall be the custodian of the Good Tidings of Peace and Power, so that the human race may live in peace in the future . . . You shall therefore now go east where I shall meet you at the place of dangers (to Onondaga)” (71).

When the great moment of Thadodahho’s conversion is near, Dekanawida has made sure Jikonsahseh is present. Together with the chief warrior, she is appointed to place deer antlers on Thadodahho’s head to confirm his authority (92).

The Great Law then states that this symbolic act is binding for all future investitures. But women’s empowerment in the League went much further, as Dekanawida declares, “I now transfer and set over to the women who have the lordships’ title vested in them, that they shall in the future have the power to appoint the successors from time to time to fill vacancies caused by death or removals from whatever cause” (97). He further gives women the authority to remove from office any chief who has, despite repeated warnings, not done his duty (34, 106). The specific ritual for this procedure states:

So you, _____, disregard and set at naught the warnings of your women relatives. So you fling the warnings over your shoulder to cast them behind you.

Behold the brightness of the Sun and in the brightness of the Sun’s light I depose you of your title

You shall now go your way alone, the rest of the people of the Confederacy will not go with you, for we know not the kind of mind that possesses you. As the Creator has nothing to do with wrong so he will not come to rescue you from the precipice of destruction in which you have cast yourself (35).

Matrilineal laws also involved property rights. "Women shall be considered the progenitors of the Nation. They shall own the land and the soil. Men and women shall follow the status of the mother" (42).

The Great Law safeguarded the order and peace of society in many other ways. There were no majority decisions quenching the concerns of the minority. Any decision had to be unanimous. At the council fire, the chairman

was provided with an eagle wing to clear the agenda of extraneous issues and a great black pole to flick aside crawling or subversive things. By its method of counseling, the council strove for harmony and attained unanimity through regularized procedures and set committees. Often unable to roll their words into one bundle, they could always, like a university faculty, bury the issue in the ashes.¹⁷

The power of the Lords was checked and balanced by the power of the people lodged in the General Council of the women and that of the men (46). Moreover, the character requirements of a "Lord" were strict:

The Lords of the Confederacy of the Five Nations shall be mentors of the people for all time. The thickness of their skin shall be seven spans—which is to say that they shall be proof against anger, offensive actions and criticism. Their hearts shall be full of peace and good will and their minds filled with a yearning for the welfare of the people of the Confederacy . . .

It shall be the duty of all of the Five Nations Confederate Lords, from time to time as occasion demands, to act as mentors and spiritual guides of their people and remind them of their Creator's will and words (37).

Integrity was more emphasized than intelligence and personal power, since it was believed that "naturally superior" men would be influential anyway and might become too powerful if made into Confederate chiefs. Also, war chiefs could not at the same time be League chiefs.¹⁸

An important part of the Great Law is the creation of symbols which remind the participating nations of their unity and their obligations.

I am Dekanawidah [sic] and with the Five Nations' Confederate Lords I plant the Tree of the Great Peace.

.....

Roots have spread out from the Tree of Great Peace, one to the north, one to the east, one to the south and one to the west.

The name of the roots is the Great White Roots and their nature is Peace and Strength.

.....

We place at the top of the Tree . . . an Eagle who is able to see afar. If he sees in the distance any evil approaching or any danger threatening he will at once warn the people of the Confederacy (30).

A bunch of shell strings (wampum) is the symbol of the Confederacy's council fire (44); five arrows bound together represent the unity of the five nations (45). The most dramatic image of peace is the uprooting of the tall pine tree which they had planted:

[I]n uprooting the tree a chasm would form so deep that it would . . . reach the swift current of the waters under it, into which the weapons of war would be thrown, and they would be borne and swept away forever by the current so that their grandchildren would never see them again. And they then uprooted the great tree and they cast into the chasm all manner of weapons of war which their people had been in the custom of using, and they then replaced the tree in its original position (102).

All political processes in the spirit of Dekanawida are sacred rights and obligations, binding the people to the Great Creator as well as to all of nature.

Whenever the Confederate Lords shall assemble for the purpose of holding council, the Onondaga Lords shall open it by expressing their gratitude to their cousin Lords and greeting them, and they shall make an address and offer thanks to the earth where men dwell, to the streams of water, the pools, the springs and the lakes, to the maize and the fruits, to the medicinal herbs and trees, to the forest trees for their usefulness, to the animals that serve as food and give their pelts for clothing, to the great winds and the lesser winds, to the Thunderers, to the Sun, the mighty warrior, to the moon, to the messengers of the Creator who reveal his wishes and to the Great Creator who dwells in the heavens above (32).

Added to this religious aspect of political affairs is, in the Condolence Ritual, the psychological one. The Haudenosaunee developed subtle psychological insights, on the personal as well as the social level, at a time when Europeans were still ignorant in these matters.¹⁹ The Condolence Ritual is always prompted by the death of a high chief.

Far beyond being merely comforting, it is an amazingly beautiful paean to life, culminating in the "resurrection" of the deceased in the form of his ritually installed successor. The two moieties, or halves, of the League—Mohawks, Onondagas, and Senecas on the one side, and Oneidas and Cayugas on the other—confront each other in the ritual. The group that has lost a high chief—either by murder or by natural death—is pictured as a grieving widow who has to be comforted by the other group. They try to clear her eyes of tears and her throat and ears of the ashes of grief. She is envisioned as being unable to grasp reality or see the sun. The corpse is provocatively elevated between the groups, but in the progression of the ritual it is lowered and finally flushed to the underworld (B143). The "water-of-pity" is poured down the throat of the grieving tribes for the purging of depression, paranoia, gall trouble, and all kinds of other havoc created by death, "the Being Malefic in Itself" (B154), "the Faceless One, the lineaments of whose face our ancestors failed to discern, the Great Destroyer" (B144).

Now, verily, therefore, they take up the Water-of-pity and now, then, let them say, "We now pour into thy body the Water-of-pity." Oh, my offspring, it shall, therefore, come to pass when this "Water-of-pity settles down in thy body it shall at once begin the work of restoring to order the organs which have been disarranged and disordered in thy body, and will bring order to thy mind also; all things will be restored and readjusted (B146).²⁰

In the case of a murdered chief, the ritual is designed to assuage the urge for revenge or possibly even for cannibalism. Twenty strings of wampum are to be paid to the aggrieved party in case of a murder (B155). Here definitely an attempt is made to overcome the ancient tradition of blood feuds by rational means of compensation.²¹ In the end, the mourners can once more perceive reality when the comforters "beautify again the sky" for them, as Dekanawida did for Hayonwatha (B51). The "duty of requickening" comes to a climax when the matron who owns the title of the deceased chief takes the arm of the newly elected successor and raises him to full stature to face the expectant clans. Eating and drinking and amusements with dream tellings end the ceremony. The men are invited to dance with the women of the opposite moiety, which symbolizes the restoration of social order.

Besides the Dekanawida narrative, the Great Law, and the Condolence Ritual, we have many other sources today, written as well as oral, which give us insight into Haudenosaunee tradition. They all confirm the basic understanding of reality expressed in these texts. The

Haudenosaunee social organization cannot be called a matriarchy. It is rather an attempt to balance the powers between the sexes.²² Women did not take care of government affairs, but they would choose, admonish, or depose the men who did. Women did not go to war, but no war could take place without their consent. They could simply withhold the necessary supply of dried corn and moccasins for a war of which they did not approve. Before the Revolutionary War, every Haudenosaunee *ohwachira*—an organized body of persons tracing descent from a common mother—elected a woman trustee chief on grounds of ability and character. She had highest authority, but never acted without advice from other mothers of her *ohwachira*. Women trustee chiefs had the power to adopt a whole tribe as a sister people or to decide whether an individual prisoner should be adopted, tortured, or killed. Adult women had the right to call for a council and to cast votes not only for themselves, but for their children as well. They also had the power of referendum, that is, they could propose for discussion “any questions which might be agitating the minds of the people.”²³ Besides owning all land and houses, women named and owned their children.

For more specifically religious matters, women as well as men were elected as “Faith-Keepers” for life, being entrusted with the proper observance of rituals and the counseling of individuals. Such women were also in charge of psychiatric cures. Women “were present at all public rituals and joined in the dances.”²⁴ In the homes, grandmothers would hold family prayers of thanksgiving. Women’s power of fertility was needed for plant growth. A woman could work magic at night by dragging her garments over the cornfield. At the midwinter festival, women, men, and children confessed their sins in public. At the Dream Feast, not bad deeds, but bad thoughts were purged from the tribe, and the women saw to it that everything was done properly. A Faith-Keeper called at each longhouse—the typical Haudenosaunee structure for home as well as Council house—to ask its matron about the dreamers in her family. Five days of the festival might be occupied with bringing the fears and worries of the year, as they appeared in dreams, out into the open to be interpreted by the group. “The Iroquois planter made everyone’s mental worries a group matter. The whole group must help with the cure or the whole group would suffer,” because repressed or uninterpreted bad dreams might come true.²⁵

Where, then, did this seemingly perfect system of social order fail? The French overpowered the confederacy militarily in the seventeenth century, and the American colonies could not forgive them their

loyalty to the British Crown in the eighteenth. What was basically a Stone Age culture could not withstand attacks of Iron Age nations. But there were also “inside” failures. The Hurons and other neighboring groups were jealous and afraid of the powerful Confederacy. Peace negotiations according to the laws of the League often seemed fruitless. In a series of military victories in the seventeenth century, the Haudenosaunee destroyed or adopted a great number of groups who were either their direct enemies or allies of those who became their fiercest foes, the French.²⁶ The Great Peace had become a military crusade for maintaining that peace. If we look back into some details of the League’s laws, we can understand the development:

When the Confederate Council of the Five Nations has for its object the establishment of the Great Peace among the people of an outside nation and that nation refuses to accept the Great Peace, then by such refusal they bring a declaration of war upon themselves from the Five Nations. Then shall the Five Nations seek to establish the Great Peace by a conquest of the rebellious nation (52).

Another problem built into the “Constitution” of the Five Nations was the lack of legal representation by adopted foreign nations. It hurt the pride of these nations to be admitted by courtesy only, and this in turn discouraged other groups from joining the League. The Haudenosaunee practiced racial discrimination by calling themselves the *Ongwehonweh* (original beings), thereby assigning second-class status to all other nations.²⁷

All of these flaws, however, are paralleled in modern Western society. The Haudenosaunee military reasoning is completely in line with modern-day arguments—in East as well as West—for a “just war.” Notions of racial superiority and a disregard for the rights of ethnic minorities have not been overcome by any of the superpowers. Contemporary nuclear issues threaten us as intergroup warfare threatened the Haudenosaunee; war might imply annihilation of all who engage in it.

Cannibalism and blood feuds, the other issues Dekanawida tried to overcome, have their parallels in our day. Extravagant amounts of beef-eating and other thoughtless consumerist habits seem to devour the very “flesh” of Third World nations.²⁸ Mistaken notions of nationalism lead to feuds as senseless as tribal revenge. Brutal torture, for which the Haudenosaunee at one time were famous because they used it as a means to test the courage of their prisoners before killing or adopting them, is still practiced in “left-wing” as well

as "right-wing" countries, as any Amnesty International report demonstrates. The task, then, is to keep searching for old or new ideas and practices which might lead beyond self-defeating old habits. We can be challenged by the great vision as well as by the failures of the Haudenosaunee, just as we are challenged by the Judeo-Christian origins as well as by later perversions of this tradition.

In summary, the epic of Dekanawida challenges our ways of looking at women, religion, and peace in the following ways:

1. The Haudenosaunee had worked out a balance of power between the sexes. Although all hunting and gathering groups accorded women a major role in their everyday affairs, the Five Nations excelled in developing an intricate political system on this basis.

The Haudenosaunee also tried to overcome personal and social injustice and senseless violence by some acts and attitudes our society usually considers "feminine," and therefore too innocuous and ineffective to establish political peace. Visions, dreams, and supernatural powers; comforting the grief-stricken to keep them from insanity and revenge; considering the physical and emotional needs of "evil" persons and even submitting at times to the authority of former "enemies"; ritually "singing away," that is, praying over, a cannibal's demonic spirit—all these gestures seem far removed from the harsh facts of contemporary international tension. However, as long as we disregard the psychological roots of warfare and murder, e.g., artificial "enemy images" or the fear of losing face and space, we will not achieve peace. As long as women are kept out of high-level decision-making, national policy will lack balance and equality, and politicians will lack the nurturing qualities needed to build a social structure of peace. As long as a leader proclaiming, "I have a dream . . ." has to die to effect political change, we have not understood the practical power of dreams.

2. The Confederacy remained a sacred institution. The chiefs were and remain priests. However, each group, even the newly adopted ones, freely practiced its specific religious traditions.²⁹ The Haudenosaunee saw statecraft, like all of life, as dependent on powers beyond their understanding and control, but also as a sacred responsibility toward all of creation, including generations "whose faces, still unborn, are coming toward thee" (B157). Even in our day, almost every ceremony begins and ends with a Thanksgiving Speech, reminding those present of their kinship with the sun ("our elder brother"), the moon ("our grandmother"), the earth ("our mother"), corn, beans, and squash ("our sisters"). Also berries and herbs, rivers

and trees, winds and birds are mentioned.³⁰ The anthropocentric Western religions could benefit from being reminded of ties to the whole cosmos and of our inability to achieve peace without concern for worldwide ecology, the stewardship of the earth, not just of one nation.

3. The Haudenosaunee did not think of peace as mere absence of war, but as a just social order, the health of society, divine law.

To the Iroquois, peace *was* the law. They used the same word for both In their thought peace was so inseparable from . . . life . . . that they had no separate term by which to denominate it. . . . The root word which, in various combinations, is used to express "peace" [among the Haudenosaunee], is the same as that used for "noble" and "the Lord" in their translations of the Bible.³¹ .

The spirit of Dekanawida can challenge us to think of peace as divine and human justice, public as well as private order, built on common psychological truths and social needs. American Indian religion has often been regarded as *mythos*, not *logos*, as "primitive" in comparison with the so-called "higher" religions.³² Actually, the Haudenosaunee belief in a male Creator deriving power from his grandmother, Sky-Woman;³³ their certainty of *orenda*, an impersonal spiritual power inherent in all plants, animals, and human beings; and their strong expression of gratefulness to the deity are only some of the traits which make this religion comparable to any of the world religions. Patriarchal religion and politics have strongly influenced the Haudenosaunee. But to this day the women show a remarkable self-assurance,³⁴ and the rational, mechanical aspects of Western culture have not erased the nations' powers of intuition and ritual. "There is life here for the people ... in the belly of this story," as Leslie Silko puts it.

Notes

¹Leslie Marmon Silko. *Ceremony*. (New York: New American Library, 1977) 2.

²See Alan R. Velie. *American Indian Literature: An Anthology*. (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1979) 3.

³It is hard to define the Dekanawida-Hayonwatha materials in terms of genre. If I use the term "epic," I realize that it may not be appropriate in all respects, but it indicates the function of the story beyond what the terms "myth" and "narrative" imply. In the title of this article I use the term "ritual" for the combination of the narrative, the Great Law, and the Condolence Ritual, because in a larger sense American Indian stories are rituals, and vice versa. I have dealt more specifically with various literary aspects of the Dekanawida

story in *Women, Ethnics, and Exotics: Images of Power in Mid-Nineteenth-Century American Fiction*, (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1983). Parts of this article are taken from the last chapter of that book.

⁴The two main texts of the narrative and the Great Law which are available in print were published by William N. Fenton as "The Constitution of the Five Nations," Book III of his volume *Parker on the Iroquois* (Syracuse: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1968) 1-155. Arthur C. Parker, partly of Seneca ancestry, was a renowned anthropologist of the 1920s whose monographs on the Iroquois were edited by Fenton. The first of these texts was written down by the Mohawk Seth Newhouse (1842-1921) in Indian English and reviewed by Albert Cusick, a New York Onondaga-Tuscarora. The second version is an official compilation of the chiefs of the Haudenosaunee Council, approved by them in 1900. It originated in the chiefs' dislike for the Newhouse version, but the latter remained the more popular form.

Besides these two printed versions, there are manuscripts in the hands of William Fenton, the most important one going back to chief John A. Gibson, the acknowledged native authority of this tradition, who died in 1912. Fenton translated Gibson's Onondaga text with the help of various native speakers.

Paul A. Wallace retold the story of the Iroquois League in *The White Roots of Peace* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Philadelphia Press, 1946), merging various versions, including those of Fenton's manuscripts. Fenton himself summarized the history of the texts and its implications for contemporary Haudenosaunee in "The Lore of the Longhouse: Myth, Ritual, and Red Power," *Anthropological Quarterly*, 48 (1975), 131-147.

The most up-to-date edition of the Condolence Ritual is found in John Bierhorst, ed., *Four Masterworks of American Indian Literature: Quetzalcoatl/ The Ritual of Condolence/ Cuceb/ The Night Chant* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974), 121-183.

⁵Anthony F.C. Wallace. "The Dekanawideh [sic] Myth Analyzed as the Record of a Revitalization Movement." *Ethnohistory*. 5 (Spring, 1958) 118-130.

⁶See Thomas E. Sanders and Walter W. Peek, eds., *Literature of the American Indian* (Hollywood: Glencoe Press, 1973) 187, and Peter Farb, *Man's Rise to Civilization: The Cultural Ascent of the Indians of North America*, rev. 2nd ed. (New York: Dutton, 1978) 90f.

⁷William N. Fenton. "The Lore of the Longhouse." *Anthropological Quarterly*. 48 (1975) 139.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., 133. Fenton speaks against the search for the one true version. My merging of the available versions is, of course, not exhaustive, but is merely pointing out the highlights pertaining to my topic.

¹⁰Page references in parentheses within the text are from Fenton, *Parker on the Iroquois*, except for references to the Condolence Ritual, which will have a B added before the number because they are from John Bierhorst, ed. *Four Masterworks of American Literature*. (NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974).

¹¹Ibid., intr., 110.

¹²The Parker texts do not mention Hayonwatha's cannibalism and relate that part of the story to Thadodahho.

¹³In the Newhouse version, Hayonwatha loses seven daughters through the wiles of Ohsinoh, a famous shaman. In the Chief's version, the accident relates to his third and last daughter, who was pregnant, not to his wife.

¹⁴According to the Parker texts, Dekanawida alone heals Thadodahho.

¹⁵The cure through singing is mentioned only in the Newhouse version. About the power of song in another Native American tradition, see Ruth Underhill, *Singing for Power: The Song Magic of the Papago Indians of Southern Arizona* (1938; rept. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1976). About the great resurgence of singing among the Haudenosaunee since 1964, see the text accompanying three records of *Iroquois Social Dance Songs*, published by Irocrafts, Ohsweken, Ont., Canada.

¹⁶Fenton, "The Lore of the Longhouse," 140, interprets the "seven crooks" removed from Thadodahho's body as "monstrous sexual organs."

¹⁷Ibid., 142.

¹⁸Elizabeth Tooker. "The League of the Iroquois: Its History, Politics, and Ritual." *Handbook of North American Indians*, vol. 15, Bruce G. Trigger, ed. (Washington, D.C. Smithsonian Institution, 1978) 429.

¹⁹Wilcomb E. Washburn. *The Indian in America*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1975) 24.

²⁰The term "offspring," which could also be translated as "nephew," is used by the three "elder" nations (Mohawks, Onondagas, Senecas) for the two "younger" nations (Oneida, Cayuga), who in the ritual play the part of the mourning widow. Kinship terms were used in all proceedings of the five nations. In fact, one aspect of Dekanawida's vision is simply the projection of kinship relations to a political level. See Fenton, "The Lore of the Longhouse," 131.

The "Water-of-Pity" is reminiscent of actual Haudenosaunee medical practice. A midwife would drop an infusion of poplar bark down a baby's throat to purge its bowels, and a hunter could be revived by dropping a sacred Little Water medicine down his throat. See Bierhorst, *Four Masterworks*, 177. Physical, psychological, and religious wholeness cannot be separated in American Indian beliefs. Barre Toelken makes this point with respect to the Navahos in his report "Seeing with a Native Eye," in *Seeing with a Native Eye: Essays on Native American Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976) 11: "The Navahos would say that there is probably nothing that can be called nonreligious," and 14f.: "For the Navaho . . . almost everything is related to health. For us health is a medical issue."

²¹Tooker, "The League of the Iroquois," 423f. For a similar struggle to abolish the law of retaliation for murder among the Cherokees in the early nineteenth century, see Thurman Wilkins, *Cherokee Tragedy: The Story of the Ridge Family and of the Decimation of a People* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1970) 27, 38. The Cherokee Blood Law had demanded the spilling of blood whenever somebody had been killed, whether accidentally or not. A fugitive from justice had to be substituted for by a relative who, though innocent, would die.

²²Irene Schumacher's *Gesellschaftsstruktur und Rolle der Frau: Das Beispiel der Irokesen* (Berlin: Duncker & Humboldt, 1972) 136, points out that there was no complete equality between the sexes among the Haudenosaunee. Women were too much tied to the home and were in the end dependent upon the men's willingness to follow their counsel. But the relative balance of authority between the sexes has been confirmed by ethnologists for all hunting and gathering societies. The classic study in this respect is still Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, in the Light of the Researches of Lewis H. Morgan*. With an Introduction and Notes by Eleanor Burke Leacock (New York: International Publishers Co., Inc., 1942, 1972. See also Karen Sacks, "Engels Revisited: Women, the Organization of Production, and Private Property," in *Woman, Culture and Society*, ed. by Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1974) 207-222; and Ruby Rohrlich-Leavitt, Barbara Sykes, and Elizabeth Weatherford, "Aboriginal Woman: Male and Female Anthropological Perspectives," in *Women Cross-Culturally: Change and Challenge*, ed. Ruby Rohrlich-Leavitt (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1975) 567-580.

²³J.N.B. Hewitt. "Status of Women in Iroquois Polity Before 1784." *Smithsonian Institution Annual Report*. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1932) 485.

²⁴Ruth M. Underhill. *Red Man's Religion: Beliefs and Practices of the Indians North of Mexico*. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1965) 177.

²⁵Ibid., 179.

²⁶Paul A.W. Wallace. *White Roots of Peace*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1946) 47-52.

²⁷See Parker, "Constitution of the Five Nations," 50, and Wallace, *White Roots of Peace*, 54. Fenton, in his introduction to Parker's texts, states that the term "implied their racial superiority." "The Constitution of the Five Nations," 9.

²⁸A basic book on this subject is Frances Moore Lappe's *Diet for a Small Planet* (New York: Ballantine Books, Inc., 1971).

²⁹See Frank G. Speck, *The Tutelo Spirit Adoptions Ceremony*. (Harrisburg, PA: Historical Commission, 1942) 2.

³⁰See Elizabeth Tooker, "Iroquois Since 1820," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, 456.

³¹Wallace, *White Roots of Peace*, 6f.

³²See Walter H. Capps's Introduction to *Seeing with a Native Eye*, ed. by Walter H. Capps 2: and Ake Hultkrantz, "The Contribution of the Study of North American Indian Religions to the History of Religions," *ibid.*, 89, 93.

³³An artistic as well as textual introduction to the Haudenosaunee beliefs about creation is the 1982 *Akwesasne Notes Calendar*, available from Akwesasne Notes, Mohawk Nation, via Rooseveltown, N.Y. 13683.

³⁴See Randle, "Iroquois Women," 170, 180.

Critique

Herzog's article is organized around three threads which she proposes as useful for strengthening the fabric of contemporary U.S. society. The three threads, teased from an exploration of a portion of the Dekanawida-Hayonwatha stories (narrative and ritual of the Haudenosaunee) are:

1. the high status of women in Haudenosaunee society
2. the understanding of statecraft as a sacred responsibility toward all creation
3. peace as justice and wholeness in the social order.

The threads found in stories dating back to about the 15th century provide a view of beliefs denominated by the Haudenosaunee society as being praiseworthy and of good report.

Traditions and rituals are not a mirror of reality. Indeed they are often developed as a formal goal, exceeding the grasp, for what should be valued rather than what is. As goals unconsummated by the present generation, stories may be set forth seeking a promise of fulfillment by the next.

The *Bible's* Psalm 78, for example, provides a different culture's similar acknowledgement of the use of stories for educating, training

and directing future generations toward better ends than the past. To paraphrase:

Let children hear the mighty deeds which God performed of old; which in our younger years we saw and which our fathers told. Our lips shall tell them to our sons, and they again to theirs; that generations yet unborn may teach them to their heirs. Thus shall they learn, in God alone their hope securely stands; that they may never forget his works, but practice his commands.

When evaluated in terms of stories, the three threads highlighted by Herzog are not unique but rather quite commonly found in the fabric of other cultures. Is it surprising then that other cultures have similarly failed to have their stories form a unity with reality?

The author proposes to “get a better perspective on Western tradition by observing the strengths and weaknesses of a completely different social order.” Herzog’s success at this task is limited by her failure to maintain a separation between traditional stories and reality in each social order during the evaluation process. At points in the reiteration of the Haudenosaunee *stories* Herzog pauses to remark, with strength of feeling, on certain *realities* of the Western social order deserving condemnation.

Although the article provides interesting insight into Haudenosaunee life, its value is somewhat diminished by the broad brush strokes used to relate the stories to Western culture and social order. It might be useful to consider how stories of women, religion, and peace have been similarly resistant to acculturation in Western societies; an analysis of “feminine qualities” as they are assigned to viewpoint and behavior rather than genetics and the role of androgyny in such a review would be most enlightening. It is true of all cultures and social orders that “you don’t have anything if you don’t have stories,” for “in the belly of this story the rituals and the ceremonies are still growing.”

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Critique

Kristin Herzog's journey into the past is a necessary journey for serious students of ethnic and American studies; she establishes the relevance and validity of oral literature which has been relegated to an inferior status by scholars in the western world. The attempt to impose an inferior status on oral literature is rather sinister when one considers the absence of a written literature has been taken to mean an absence of intellectual activity on the part of such people. Not only American Indians but also Africans have suffered a great deal because of the tendency to regard such people as lacking in culture or intellectual achievements. On the contrary, the oral tradition has been the strength of ancient cultures as Kristin Herzog shows and was brought to light in a remarkable way by Alex Haley in his novel *ROOTS*. Alex Haley went back to a living ancient tradition in The Gambia and brought to life and to the attention of the world the richness of an African culture while documenting his personal history. There is, however, a danger that oral tradition might not stand up to critical scientific analysis but this does not mean that it cannot be validated by evidence from other sources supporting it. The main point to be made however is that oral tradition is a legitimate tradition.

Herzog's narrative touches on two universals: the need for people to live on this planet with peace among all and the need for all people to realize that while life is in many ways masculine that the feminine principle in life is equally important. The stories that she draws from to demonstrate the search for peace among American Indian people comes close to our times when we are also searching for peace in a troubled world. It is important, however, to note that in the stories that she narrates, there is a similarity to the Christian ideals and the Christian notion of a redeemer who would free people and bring them all peace. There might be a tendency on the part of some critics to believe that the Christian ideas have been incorporated after the fact into American Indian rituals. This is a temptation that must be resisted. We have to take the stories as they are, giving credit to American Indian people who, after all, like all other people, have only given expression to a universal need for living peacefully. The stories also deal with the timeless struggle between good and evil with good prevailing in the end.

The feminine principle which has come upon us in the western world of late had obviously been understood by ancient cultures long before

it became an element in Euroamerican society. In Chinua Achebe's famous novel, *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo, the hero in the novel who is a strong African warrior and whose greatest weakness in life was that he was afraid he would be called a "woman," is told by his kinsmen in his motherland when he is down in life, that the feminine principle is very important, that is why "mother is called 'supreme.'" The American Indian ritual also clearly demonstrates this principle and it will do us a world of good to take this journey back into time to learn as Kofi Awoonor, a Ghanaian poet, once said, "by reaching for the stars, we stop at the house of the moon."

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Critique

After a lengthy description of the various facets of Haudosaunee ritual, Kristin Herzog makes some interesting statements on the parallels between our modern day social arguments and those which plagued them centuries ago. The unique feature of Haudosaunee social organization is its systematic balance of power between the sexes. Although it is doubtful that American women who are currently engaged in a struggle for political and social power will achieve quite the same degree of equity, just studying a society in which such a balance was achieved is helpful for those in the process of defining women's goals and objectives.

Herzog's description of the way in which the epic of Dekanawida has survived culturally among the Haudosaunee in spite of assimilation attempts brings to mind a similar phenomenon among Afroamericans. In 1943, the editor of the *American Mercury Magazine* asked the anthropologist and novelist Zora Neale Hurston to write an essay which would give Americans hope during the dark days of World War II. In fulfilling the assignment Hurston chose to discuss one aspect of Afroamerican folklore that had been the secret to black survival since the early days of slavery. The essay, entitled "High John De Conqueror," became part of Hurston's larger mission to alleviate white America's ignorance about Afroamericans, and their myths and rituals.

According to Hurston, High John De Conqueror originated in Africa as "a whisper, a will to hope, a wish to find something worthy of

laughter and a song,"¹ and he crossed the Atlantic with the slaves not on the ship itself but by "walking the very winds that filled its sails . . . He followed over them like the albatross" (p. 94). Upon arrival in the New World, High John took on flesh and walked the plantations like a "natural man" whispering comforting words to their spirituals and who told them almost one hundred years before it happened that their freedom would one day come. After emancipation High John is believed to have returned to Africa but not without leaving some of his power in America in the root of a certain plant. During the early years of the twentieth century when thousands of Afroamericans migrated north to seek jobs, housing, and education, the High John root rode with some of them in the bottom of suitcases and boxes. As Hurston explains it, this root helped many of them confront the harsh realities of urban living such as being evicted or losing one's job:

The thousands upon thousands of humble people who still believe in him, that is, in the power of love and laughter to win by their subtle power, do John reverence by getting the root of the plant in which he has taken up his secret dwelling, and "dressing" it with perfume, and keeping it on their person, or in their houses in a secret place. It is there to help them overcome things they feel that they could not beat otherwise and to bring them the laugh of the day (p. 102).

High John appears as a recurring motif in Afroamerican literature. In his novel *Invisible Man*, Ralph Ellison's protagonist sees a black woman in the north who has been evicted from her apartment sitting on the sidewalk next to her furniture. She had hidden her High John root in one of her bureau drawers and at the moment when he sees her she is holding it.² Herzog's description of Hayonwatha meditating over a string of wampum shells and Dekanawida's using those same shells to speak words of comfort which restore the sanity of mind to the bereaved man is similar to the function of the High John root both in Afroamerican literature and among Afroamerican folk (those humble people), who believe in the power of the supernatural. In both instances the individual is fortified by rubbing, holding, and meditating over a physical object which restores a level of sanity and permits them to function in spite of the trying circumstances.

What Hurston in 1943 and Herzog in 1983 are both advocating is that there can be a fair exchange between the folk cultures of America and mass urban cultures. In return for an opportunity to advance economically and politically in this country, American minorities, especially those with a mythic orientation, make contributions to the

spiritual health of the whole society. In the case of the Haudenosaunee as Herzog indicates, they can also offer help in settling issues related to women and to peace.

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Notes

1. Zora Neale Hurston. "High John De Conqueror." *American Mercury Magazine*. No. 57 (October, 1943). 450-458. For this critique I have used Hurston's essay as it is reprinted in the *Book of Negro Folklore*. Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps, eds. (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1958) 93-102. Subsequent references to this essay are from this reprint and page numbers appear in the text.
2. Another Afroamerican work in which the belief in the power of roots and herbs is used to help a character endure is Anne Petry's novel *The Street* (1946).

Critique

The value of Herzog's study, in addition to the factual information presented, is a tragic reminder of two interrelated truths: 1) by studying history we could learn how to make a better world in which to live; and, 2) we do not learn from history. The women's movement of recent years has two aspects which do not, for all times, go together. One moving force in its genesis is the demand that physical and emotional abuse and misuse of women by men cease. The other, not necessarily related to the first, is that of equal status, which includes equal access to employment, legal protection, compensation and, less tangibly, human dignity. Herzog presents us in this study with a society which, in its idealized form, represents an "attempt to balance the powers between the sexes." What men and women did was not deemed the same, but men and women had parallel significant voices.

In the European-American pre-industrial days, the rural family divided the tasks. Again, in an idealized form, men had certain duties, women others, but each could feel as important as the other. The industrial revolution changed all that; men "worked" while women "stayed home."

Herzog's study brings to the reader a society (under the Haudenosaunee Confederation) which, had it been successful, would have been a model to be studied. But, as I pointed out initially, we do not learn

from history. Not fully developed in this article, however, is the obvious fact that within white Euroamerican culture “feminine” ideas (such as believing that “Thou shall not kill” means that it is not right to kill, period) are not generally taken seriously. American Indian societies are often pointed out as respecting (i.e., holding in respect) persons who assume attitudes and characteristics normally attributed to those of the other sex. Perhaps further study of Herzog’s materials will reveal that that broader tolerance for what is now called “sexual orientation” is a factor in the “balance of power of the sexes.” I hope she will undertake continued research in this direction.

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Perception and Power Through Naming: Characters in Search of a Self in the Fiction of Toni Morrison

Linda Buck Myers

"When I use a word," said Humpty Dumpty in a rather scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less."

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many things."

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master—that's all."

—Lewis Carroll,
Through the Looking Glass

Humpty Dumpty was correct to see the important connection between language and power; and if Lewis Carroll had developed this discussion further, he might have had his characters comment as well on the interrelationship between language and thought, language and culture, and language and social change. While linguists and anthropologists continue the difficult debate about whether language *is* culture or is merely "related" to culture, and while sociolinguists and psychologists question the effects of language on society and on the psyche, American blacks and women understand all too well that "He is master who can define,"¹ and that the process of naming and defining is not an intellectual game but a grasping of experience and a key to action.

Since Aristotle's *Organon* described the theory of opposition and the logical relation between a simple affirmation and the corresponding simple denial, Western thought has worked by oppositions:

Man/Woman, Father/Mother, Head/Heart, Sun/Moon, Culture/Nature, White/Black, Master/Slave, etc.; and Standard English has reflected a peculiarly Western need to rank and quantify. Toni Morrison, in each of her four novels, has combined conventional and creative components of language to reveal the ways in which black culture is reflected and distorted “through the looking glass” of white culture; and Morrison’s novels, taken together, provide a startling critique of the inadequacy of existing language and the destructiveness of the simplistic two-term patterns which have shaped much of Western thought since Aristotle. *The Bluest Eye* (1970), for example, shows what happens when “beauty” and “ugliness” are placed in opposition, and *Sula* (1973) explodes the demarcations between “good” and “evil” and between “innocence” and guilt.” *Song of Solomon* (1978) destroys fixed notions of being alive or “Dead” and of “love” and “hate,” and it continues to develop the motif from the two earlier novels of the power of naming. Finally, *Tar Baby* (1982) reveals how false and inadequate are the apparent divisions between nature and culture, servant and master, black and white; and it shows as well the impossibility of delineating between exile and rescue and between victimization and power. In addition, each of Morrison’s novels deals with the difficult question of black identity—how it is defined and named to begin with, how it becomes perverted, and how it can be realized and reclaimed in this world.

I

Toni Morrison’s first novel is about racism and its ugly byproducts within a black community. *The Bluest Eye* depicts a world of “cu-ute” Shirley Temple dolls and Mary Jane candies, where Jean Harlow is the ideal of all that is beautiful and where white standards of beauty and behavior have twisted the identities of black children and adults. The novel tells the story of two sisters, Frieda and Claudia MacTeer, and of their friend Pecola Breedlove, whose intense desire for blue eyes leads to her final tragedy.

The “ugliness” of the ironically named Breedlove family is central to this book. Pecola spends hours in front of her mirror “trying to discover the secret of her ugliness”² (39, BE) and praying that God will make her disappear. The narrator says of Pecola and her family:

You looked at them and wondered why they were so ugly; you

looked closely and could not find the source. Then you realized that it came from conviction, their conviction. It was as though some mysterious all-knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had accepted it without question. The master had said, "You are ugly people." They had looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement; saw, in fact, support for it leaning at them from every billboard, every movie, every glance. "Yes," they had said. "You are right." And they took the ugliness in their hands, threw it as a mantle over them, and went about the world with it (34, BE).

Morrison makes it evident that neither Pecola nor her family will ever know their own beauty, for they see themselves only according to the standards of "some mysterious all-knowing master" and through the eyes of people whose notions of beauty come from white society. As the narrator points out, physical beauty is one of the "most destructive ideas in the history of human thought" (97, BE).

Unlike Pecola, Claudia and Frieda do not begin to have "contempt for their own blackness" and to share in "the exquisitely learned self-hatred of their race" until they encounter Maureen Peal, "a high-yellow dream child." Pointedly nicknamed "Meringue Pie" by the two sisters, Maureen taunts Claudia, Frieda and Pecola and screams, "I *am* cute. And you ugly! Black and ugly e mos. I *am* cute!" Claudia narrates:

We were sinking under the wisdom, accuracy, and relevance of Maureen's last words. If she was cute—and if anything could be believed, she *was*—then we were not. And what did that mean? We were lesser (61, BE).

In spite of the anger and jealousy the girls feel when they become aware of the effect "the Maureen Peals of the world" have on others, Claudia admits:

And all the time we knew that Maureen Peal was not the Enemy and not worthy of such intense hatred. The *Thing* to fear was the *Thing* that made *her* beautiful, and not us" (62, BE).

The point is made that when an unnamed *Thing* is pervasive in a culture, it may remain invisible or be rendered unrecognizable if it is not named, or if it is *misnamed*.

At the end of *The Bluest Eye*, when Pecola's baby has died and she spends her days lost in madness picking through garbage, Claudia looks back with understanding:

All of us—all who knew her— felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness. Her simplicity decorated us, her guilt sanctified us, her pain made us glow with health, her awkwardness made us think we had a sense of humor . . . We honed our egos on her, padded our characters with her frailty, and yawned in the fantasy of our strength (159, BE).

Claudia sees, finally, that she and Frieda are not completely innocent with regard to Pecola, that they too have "assassinated" something in her. Morrison makes it clear that the sisters and others in the community have defined themselves in relation to, and always in opposition to, Pecola. By depending on the existence of Pecola as the other half of their own equations, and by making Pecola Object and themselves Subject; they succeed in creating an Other but are unable to create a Self.

II

In *The Bluest Eye*, Soaphead Church, "Reader, Adviser, and Interpreter of Dreams," writes a letter to God in which he asks, "What makes one name more a person than another? Is the name the real thing, then? And the person only what his name says?" (142, BE). In *Sula*, Toni Morrison gives us a universe where black people live "up in the Bottom" and where even "the Bottom" collapses, and she illustrates that naming can be, and often is, a subversive activity. Here one grown man is called BoyBoy and another, "with milky skin and cornsilk hair," is called TarBaby. Here, two women named Wright are often wrong, while those named Peace sometimes kill; and here a boy named "dewey," with beautiful deep black skin and golden eyes, is indistinguishable from a red-headed, freckle-faced, light-skinned boy named "dewey," who is indistinguishable from a half-Mexican boy with chocolate skin and black bangs named "dewey."

Unlike Pecola and other characters in *The Bluest Eye* who take their definitions of what they ought to be from billboards, movies, and the glances of others, Sula Peace leads an "experimental life" and sets out to "make herself." Sula is restless, independent, totally self-

reliant; and because she is free and is willing to take risks unhampered by the norms of her community, she is an enigma and a threat. Morrison uses the other main characters in *Sula* (particularly Shadrack, Eva and the deweys, and Nel), to place Sula in relief and to demonstrate why she becomes “dangerous.”

Shadrack, the first character Morrison introduces in *Sula*, is “blasted and permanently astonished” by his participation in the First World War. He “walks about with his penis out, pees in front of ladies and girl-children,” and is “the only black who could curse white people and get away with it” (53, S). Having learned in the War about the unexpectedness of death, Shadrack has instituted National Suicide Day as the one day each year on which people might kill themselves or each other. In this way, he believes, he is “making a place for fear as a way of controlling it” (12, S). Morrison uses Shadrack and his controlled madness and organized eccentricity in contrast to Sula and her freedom. The narrator says of Shadrack: “Once the people understood the boundaries and nature of his madness, they could fit him, so to speak, into the scheme of things” (13, S). In contrast, the townspeople cannot understand Sula’s freedom or the nature of her “experimental life”; and because they cannot fit her into the scheme of things, they “fingerprint her for all time” with names and labels (97, S). Just as Shadrack labels National Suicide Day to contain and limit fear, the townspeople label Sula “evil”; and their naming her “the source of their personal misfortune” helps them survive the chaos of living.

Similarly, Eva Peace—Sula’s mysterious, one-legged grandmother—uses names to manipulate chaos into an appearance of order. Reigning from a wagon on the third floor of 7 Carpenter’s Road, Eva is a crippled deity “directing the lives of her children, friends, strays, and a constant stream of boarders” (26, S). One of Eva’s particular creations is a trinity of deweys, three little boys who arrive at Eva’s house at different times with nothing but their woolen caps and their names. Eva takes away their caps, ignores their names, and calls each one “dewey.” When people complain, Eva retorts, “What you need to tell them apart for? They’s all deweys” (32, S). The deweys are very different from one another in coloring, size, and age, but in time—with Eva saying things like “Send one of them deweys out to get me some Garret” or, “Tell them deweys to cut out that noise,” and “Send me a

dewey”—each boy accepts Eva’s viewpoint and becomes “in fact as well as in name a dewey” (33, S). By the time they go to school, the teacher cannot tell the deweys apart; and eventually, it is rumored, one of their mothers comes to claim her son and cannot tell which boy is hers.

Sula, unlike the deweys, will not conform to anyone’s expectations. While Eva revels in her power, delights in naming and creating the deweys, and informs Sula that she ought to settle down and have children, Sula insists: “I don’t want to make somebody else. I want to make myself” (80, S).

Even as a young girl growing up in the Bottom, Sula was active and unusually independent. At eleven, she and her best friend, Nel Wright, discovered that

they were neither white nor male, and that all freedom and triumph was forbidden to them; they had set about creating something else to be. Their meeting was fortunate, for it let them use each other to grow on (44, S).

Sula and Nel are bound for life by a guilty secret about their role in a small boy’s drowning; and although Sula leaves the Bottom and stays away for ten years after Nel marries, Sula’s eventual return to Medallion is, for Nel, “like getting the use of an eye back” (82, S). When Sula begins sleeping with almost everyone’s husband, including Nel’s, however, Nel can neither understand nor forgive what is to her a betrayal of their friendship.

Sula’s flouting of local taboos causes the entire community to unite against her:

Their conviction of Sula’s evil changed them in accountable yet mysterious ways. Once the source of their personal misfortune was identified, they had leave to protect and love one another. They began to cherish their husbands and wives, protect their children, repair their homes, and in general band together against the devil in their midst (102, S).

The people in the Bottom use Sula—“roach,” “bitch,” “devil,” “witch”—as a tension to rub up against and as the evil Other compared to whom they are good. Interestingly, when Sula is dead, people stop making an effort to be good to one another, and, the narrator tells us, affection for others sinks into “flaccid disrepair” (132, S).

As Sula lies dying, Nel comes to visit her for the first time in several years. The women argue, and as Nel is leaving Sula alone to die, Sula asks, "How you know? About who was good. How you know it was you?" (126, S). And after Sula's death, when Nel visits Eva in a nursing home, the old woman confuses Nel with her granddaughter. Eva demands to know how Nel killed Chicken Little, and Nel insists that it was Sula who threw the boy into the water. Eva snaps: "You. Sula. What's the difference . . . Just alike. Both of you. Never was no difference between you . . ." (144-145, S).

At the end of the novel, Morrison gives her readers the satisfaction of Nel's learning, finally, to recognize Sula's glory; but we are left wondering about Shadrack, who is "still energetically mad"; and about Eva, who "feeble-minded or not . . . knew what she was doing. Always had" (147, S); and about the deweys, who apparently died in an accident in 1941, but who seem to have been resurrected in the young people of 1965 who "had a look about them that everybody said was new but which reminded Nel of the deweys whom nobody had ever found" (140, S).

In *Sula*, then, Morrison both challenges traditional assumptions about morality and critiques language by revealing that it is impossible ever to sort out completely the good from the bad or the innocent from the guilty. By depicting a universe where creation and naming subvert personal identity, Morrison demonstrates that our modes of discourse and of thought have gotten out of control and that the strategies humans have used to survive are themselves bringing about destruction and pain.

III

In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola saw herself only through the eyes of other people. In *Sula*, the main character invented herself and led an experimental life; but, we are told, "She had no center, no speck around which to grow" (103, S). In Toni Morrison's third novel, *Song of Solomon*, protagonist Milkman Dead is confused about who he is and about the direction his life should take. By the time Milkman is five years old, it has become his habit to concentrate "on things behind him almost as though there were no future to be had" (35, *Song*); and at twenty-two, he is described by the narrator as having a face which

taken apart, looked all right. Even better than all right. But it lacked a coherence, a coming together of the features into a

total self. It was all very tentative, the way he looked, like a man peeping around a corner or someplace he is not supposed to be, trying to make up his mind whether to go forward or to turn back (69-70, Song).

When Milkman finally chooses to turn back, his journey into the past leads to knowledge of his real name and results in his "coming together" into a "total self."

The first chapter of *Song of Solomon* sets up Morrison's motif of naming, with intricate and often amusing descriptions of the processes involved in the naming of places in the black community. The author relates, for example, how the residents reclaimed Mains Avenue from the U.S. Post Office and the city legislators and renamed it Not Doctor Street; she tells, too, how they renamed the so-called charity hospital, where no blacks could practice medicine or be admitted as patients, No Mercy Hospital. In addition, Morrison provides a rich documentation of the history and naming of her characters. Milkman, for example, received his name from the town gossip, who saw him still nursing at his mother's breast at a time when his legs were "dangling almost to the floor"; and Milkman's father, Macon Dead, was named after the first Macon Dead, whose name was the result of a recording error made by a clerk at the Freedmen's Bureau. Macon Dead explains:

The man behind the desk was drunk. He asked Papa where he was born. Papa said Macon. Then he asked him who his father was. Papa said, "He's dead." Asked him who owned him, Papa said, "I'm free." Well, the Yankee wrote it all down, but in the wrong spaces . . . In the space for his name the fool wrote, "Dead" comma "Macon" (53, Song).

The first Macon Dead's wife liked the name, said it was new "and would wipe out the past" (54, Song), but the second Macon Dead is angry at the wiped out past and thinks:

Surely he and his sister had some ancestor, some lithe young man with onyx skin and legs as straight as cane stalks, who had a name that was real. A name given to him at birth with love and seriousness. A name that was not a joke, nor a disguise, nor a brand name. But who this lithe young man was, and where his cane-stalk legs carried him from or to, could never be known. No. Nor his name (17-18, Song).

Much of the story of the novel is Milkman's search for real names and for this longed-for ancestor.

Milkman's quest begins with his wonderful Aunt Pilate. [Pilate's

name had been selected when her father, the first Macon Dead, unable to read or write, pointed to a word in the Bible and copied it painstakingly onto a piece of paper. Pilate keeps the handwritten name her father gave her in a brass snuff box which hangs from her ear—a bizarre earring proclaiming that *her* name can never be lost or taken from her.] With information from Pilate, Milkman pieces together the puzzle of his ancestry and journeys south.

In the small Southern town where his grandparents lived before moving north, Milkman goes coon hunting with a group of men and experiences a mystical journey to his true self.

He found himself exhilarated by simply walking the earth. Walking it like he belonged to it; like his legs were stalks, tree trunks, a part of his body that extended down down down into the rock and soil, and were comfortable there—on the earth and on the place where he walked. And he did not limp (284, Song).

Here Milkman realizes that he is his *own* roots, and we realize that he has become the lithe young man about whom his father dreamed. By going into the earth and feeling himself a part of it, Milkman connects with the past and perceives that he and the world are not Dead, but alive.

Soon after Milkman learns his grandparents' real names and after he realizes his identity, his closest friend, Guitar, reveals his intent to murder Milkman. A revolutionary who belongs to a black terrorist organization which murders whites out of "love" for blacks, Guitar has stalked Milkman from the North to the South because of a misunderstanding between them. At the end of the novel, Guitar's love kills Pilate and presumably will kill his dear friend, too; and Milkman knows that

anything could appear to be something else, and probably was. Nothing could be taken for granted. Women who loved you tried to cut your throat, while women who didn't even know your name scrubbed your back. Witches could sound like Katharine Hepburn and your best friend could try to strangle you. Smack in the middle of an orchid there might be a blob of jello and inside a Mickey Mouse doll, a fixed and radiant star (335, Song).

Like Milkman, readers of Toni Morrison also know by now that nothing can be taken for granted in her fictional universe.

On the final page of the novel, both Pilate and Milkman are free of being Dead and are flying. As Milkman is laying Pilate's dead body on

a rock, a bird dives into the new grave where Pilate has just buried her father's bones along with the earring which holdname. The bird scoops Pilate's earring in its beak and flies away, and Milkman realizes: "Without ever leaving the ground, she could fly" (340, Song). He stands up to fly too, though he knows that Guitar will shoot him. Milkman has discovered what his great-grandfather knew, that "If you surrendered to the air, you could *ride* it" (341, Song). The promise set forth on the book's opening page has been kept: "The fathers may soar/And the children may know their names."

Unlike the naming in *Sula* which gave order to, but took freedom away from, that which was named, the naming in *Song of Solomon* gives knowledge, freedom, and flight to those who know their names. Morrison suggests here that once false naming is corrected and a true naming or renaming takes place, death ends and life begins. Naming and renaming become revolutionary acts: i.e. people name parts of the world for themselves, and as they choose or rediscover their true names, they upset a world order which has been taken for granted for centuries, and they make possible new ways of viewing the world and of living in it.

IV

In *Tar Baby*, Morrison continues the critique of language and novel, Morrison deals with individuals and groups in relationship—men and women, blacks and whites, servants and masters; and she demonstrates, in the hopeless love affair between Jadine and Son, the impossibility of separating culture from nature and of differentiating rescue from exile.

As an intruder-outlaw in the home of Jadine's white benefactor, Son spends several long nights hidden in Jadine's bedroom watching her sleep:

He had thought hard during those times in order to manipulate her dreams, to insert his own dreams into her so she would not wake or stir or turn over on her stomach but would lie still and dream steadily the dreams he wanted her to have about yellow houses with white doors which women opened and shouted Come on in, you honey you! and the fat black ladies in white dresses minding the pie table in the basement of the church and white wet sheets flapping on a line . . . Oh, he thought hard, very hard during those times to press his dreams of icehouses into hers . . . (119, TB).

Jadine is not a woman who can allow a man to “insert his dreams into her own,” however. She fights hard in the struggle against being what Margaret Atwood calls “a captive princess in someone’s head”; so when Son and Jadine first speak, he knows there is danger. She will after all, be playing tar baby to his rabbit. Son senses in the beginning that “at any moment she might talk back or, worse, press her dreams of gold and cloisonné and honey-colored silk into him and then who would mind the pie table in the basement of the church?” (120, TB).

Jadine is a black woman who likes *Ave Maria* better than gospel music and Picasso better than Itumba masks, and it is unlikely that she will want to share Son’s dreams of life in the briar patch. Her struggle is depicted in her encounters with the “night women,” who in “their exceptional femaleness” and with “their permanent embrace,” wonder at Jadine’s “desperate struggle down below to be free, to be something other than they were” (183, TB). Jadine both fears and desires all that Son represents, for she sees that he, like the night women, would grab the person she has worked so hard to become and make her over according to his dreams.

When the two become involved, each thinks of their affair not just as love, but as rescue:

The rescue was not going well. She thought she was rescuing him from the night women who wanted him for themselves, wanted him feeling superior in a cradle, deferring to him; wanted her to settle for wifely competence when she could be almighty, to settle for fertility rather than originality, nurturing instead of building. He thought he was rescuing her from Valerian, meaning *them*, the aliens, the people who in a mere three hundred years had killed a world millions of years old (269, TB).

Unfortunately, only Son can make Jadine feel “unorphaned,” and only Jadine can give him back his “original, shiny dime.” Still, Jadine knows that Son’s original dime, the one he is so proud of, is “a piece of currency rooted in gold and humiliation and death,” and he knows that loving Jadine means that “the ladies minding the pie table will vanish like shadows under a noon gold sun.”

Built on extreme oppositions, their relationship becomes the classic confrontation between the old values of the tribe and the new values of the city, between community and the individual, between nature and culture:

Each was pulling the other away from the maw of hell—its very

ridge top. Each knew the world as it was meant or ought to be. One had a past, the other a future and each one bore the culture to save the race in his hands. Mama-spoiled black man, will you mature with me? Culture-bearing black woman, whose culture are you bearing? (269, TB).

The two questions are at the core of the novel. Son is just what his name indicates—an eternal son whose desire it is to remain in a kind of magical, natural state. Jadine is the more “mature” one, but her losses have been big ones. It is clear that she, like the “tar baby” in the folk tale, is the creation of the white man.

In the end Jadine returns to Paris without Son. Morrison indicates that she will continue tangling with the night women and that she will have “no more dreams of safety.” As Jadine’s plane flies over a rain forest, the narrator tells us “single-minded soldier ants” march straight ahead and the queen “begins her journey searching for a suitable place to build her kingdom.” Jadine realizes she is herself the “safety she longed for,” but Morrison does not sugarcoat Jadine’s escape or let us believe for a moment that her decision is a painless one: “It would be hard. So very hard to forget the man who fucked like a star” (292, TB).

Son’s epiphanic moment occurs when he sees a little island girl in an American-made wig “the color of dried blood” and recognizes that he “had it straight before: the pie ladies and the six-string banjo.” At the end of the novel, Son is shown running in the hills, where it is said that naked men gallop like angels:

The mist lifted and the trees stepped back a bit as if to make the way easier for a certain kind of man. Then he ran. Lickety-split. Lickety-split. Looking neither to the left nor to the right. Lickety-split. Lickety-split. Lickety-split. Lickety-lickety-lickety-split (306, TB).

Back in the briar patch at last, Son is like the clever rabbit in the tale who lickety-splits away from the tar baby and the mean white farmer singing, “This is where I was born and bred at.”

The ending of *Tar Baby* opens up more than it closes off. Will Jadine ever get away from the night women? And is her freedom rendered meaningless if it comes at the cost of dreaming? Is Son really free if his life is confined to the briar patch? Morrison uses the thwarted love between Son and Jadine to illuminate the tragic losses which result from an Either/Or world view and from the demand for victory and hierarchy over unity and compromise.

In *Tar Baby*, as in her earlier novels, Morrison shuns simple answers to complex questions and demonstrates consistently, and with deep sorrow, that in this world "love" is never simple and is never enough. In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison's narrator tells us,

Love is never any better than the lover. Wicked people love wickedly, violent people love violently, weak people love weakly, stupid people love stupidly . . . (159, BE).

Thus, to Alice's question in *Through the Looking Glass* about "whether you can make words mean so many things," Morrison's work stands as an emphatic affirmative response. Toni Morrison would have us see that words *mean* many things and that names *do* many things; and she would have us understand how individual identities are thwarted, personal histories are buried, and human life is wasted because of inadequate, lying language. Taken together, the novels of Toni Morrison demonstrate the extent to which perception becomes fossilized by language and by simplistic black-and-white thought systems which deny the infinite shades of individual feeling and the full spectrum of human experience. Implicit in Toni Morrison's fiction are a revaluing of the so-called negative sides of the traditional dualisms and a transformation of the hierarchical mentality.

Notes

¹Stokeley Carmichael at Morgan State College, January 16, 1967, quoted in *Language in America*, Neil Postman, Charles Weingartner, and Terence Moran, eds. (New York: Western Publishing Company, Inc., 1969).

²Quotations from Toni Morrison's novels are indicated by page number(s) with the letters BE, S, Song, and TB. Editions cited in this article are: *The Bluest Eye* (New York: Pocket Books, 1970); *Sula* (New York: Bantam Books, 1973); *Song of Solomon* (New York: Signet Books, 1978); and *Tar Baby* (New York: Plume Books, 1982).

Critique

In "Stranger in the Village" (1953), James Baldwin asserted that "the root function of language is to control the universe by describing it." In her article on naming in Toni Morrison's novels, Linda Buck Myers asks us to consider Morrison's insights regarding who does the controlling and how. In the end Myers offers us a number of useful and provocative observations regarding language and our uses of it as they inform ethnic experience.

Among the more interesting observations of the article are the following: (1) Naming is a much more complex phenomenon than it is usually taken to be, with many more motives and implications than are typically acknowledged. Names can be given, taken, borrowed, modified, corrupted, abandoned, lost. A name can be a curse, blessing, defense, legacy, accident, promise, threat, joke, disguise, weapon, or tool. Especially in the lives of ethnic peoples, imposed upon by the "unnamed Things" of dominant culture, a conscious awareness and control of the naming process is one of the keys to identity and survival. Although naming can be a casual or sardonic exercise, an ironic or self-deprecating gesture, it can also be the gesture that enables us to identify and know ourselves.

(2) Language is inextricably a tool of the social order. That is, it identifies and designates everything from aesthetic values to social attitudes and theological assumptions. While naming in particular can reflect the need and responsibility to control one's immediate experience, the use of language in general is crucial in the relationships of individuals to social concepts such as conformity, acquiescence, and power. The conscious, insistent alteration that results in the place name "Not Doctor Street" is indeed combative, subversive, and liberating; it is a statement about the nature of one particular group's relationship to another.

(3) Naming, one of the earliest forms of language to which a person (and a people) is exposed, is only the beginning of a complex relationship with how words work. One can, of course, take charge of language in social or economic or political terms. These are all clearly important, immediately functional applications. But in the end, on what is a more indirect but finally no less functional level, one can take charge of language by shaping it into intricate figures of speech and typography, the consciously shaped form of the created object—the poem, the story, the novel. This is, of course what Morrison has done: focus the artist's passion for arranging words on pieces of paper

(as Joan Didion once put it) so as to generate complex metaphors of tragedy, self-knowledge, and liberation. There is, in other words, a clear line of development from naming to *flying*. It is a progress of which all are capable if they only grasp, as Morrison points out and Myers explains, how it all begins with names.

In Part IV of her article, Myers sets aside the explicit emphasis on naming and language that informs her prior analysis, focusing instead on the thematic question of opposing assumptions, forces, and beliefs, and the disabling dialectical mindset that creates them. This is, perhaps, as it should be, since the basic thrust of Morrison's own work is toward the perception and power that grow out of an attentiveness to individual words.

—Neil Nakadate
Iowa State University

Critique

There is always something final, of having said much of what appears to need saying, when we deal with opposites, when we discuss anything in terms of antipodes. Linda Buck Myers's article, "Perception and Power through Naming: Characters in Search of a Self in the Fiction of Toni Morrison," gives me this feeling; and, having considered the matter, she has not "said everything," but she has pointed the way and perceptively located what should become a main vein in the study of Toni Morrison. Language has always been the very stuff of literature, and Myers is correct in highlighting Morrison's clear desire to name anew, to baptize, as it were, the words we prosaically use in order to turn the language into a tool to provide readers with new ways of looking at black Americans. Semiotics has taught us that language does and does not designate, that it names in naming and not naming; and, having thus named, that our very words decree the interpretation of everything we see. This last, to be sure, is a currently fashionable reworking of the basic ideas that Edward Sapir first broached in *Language* (1921), and Myers brings much of this heritage to explain Morrison's work. Morrison says something like: "Look, this is how many Americans tend to look at blacks in America, and this is why we see them as we do." She says further: "But this, my readers, is not what the black world is. In many ways, this world is shaped, like everything else, by the perspectives imposed on it; if you, however,

understand the nature and the whys of these perspectives, then you will paradoxically see the tragedy and the triumph of the black experiences that I write about." Morrison is easily among the best writers using English today, and Myers recognizes and anchors her article on this fact.

—Marco A. Portales
University of Houston, Clear Lake

Critique

Linda Buck Myers's "Perception and Power Through Naming" is an especially interesting and perceptive analysis of some of the unique ways in which Toni Morrison uses language to develop meaning through characterization; and the article deals with issues that are at the thematic core of Morrison's four published novels. Indeed, the subtitle of the article, "Characters in Search of a Self in the Fiction of Toni Morrison," is perhaps a more accurate description of what the author properly finds to be basic to an understanding of Morrison's fiction. The need for people to achieve self-identity within a societal framework is, as the article suggests, what Morrison believes to be the way to happiness. It is because of their failure (both from within and from external forces) to fuse that seeming duality that Morrison's characters so often are tragic figures. The sense of community or social responsibility (or whatever the tag) is crucial to self-identity in Morrison's novels. Societal membership entails awareness of who one is and of where one came from; the tragedy that befalls Morrison's characters stems from their inability to reach out for the sake of others and for the sake of themselves—to become loving, caring, whole people. And, ultimately, the hope that Morrison sees is conveyed by the very tone of her novels, which reveals her own sense of loving and caring—her refusal, for example, to reject the Sulas and Maureens and Jadines.

Myers does an excellent job of describing some of the depths and complexities of Morrison's novels. Actually, my major criticism of the article is that it is overly ambitious, that it attempts to analyze more

aspects of the meaning of Morrison's novels and the way those meanings are developed than can be handled within the framework of a relatively short piece. Indeed, the title, "Perception and Power Through Naming," promises a more sharply limited discussion than is actually presented. Among other things, the article deals with some of the principal and unique ways in which Morrison uses language as a means of "defining." "Naming" is but one of them, and it is dealt with only partially.

A very different point: The article begins and ends with a reference to the exchange between Humpty Dumpty and Alice. But in concluding that "to Alice's question . . . about 'whether you can make words mean so many things,' Morrison's work stands as an emphatic affirmative response," Myers appears to misread the point of the passage from *Through the Looking Glass*. Lewis Carroll ridicules Humpty Dumpty's arbitrariness, for while words may mean many things, one cannot make them mean whatever one chooses. Note the exchange that precedes the quoted passage, Humpty Dumpty states:

"There's glory for you!"

"I don't know what you mean by 'glory,'" Alice said.

Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. "Of course you don't—till I tell you. I meant 'there's a nice knock-down argument for you!'"

"But 'glory' doesn't mean 'a nice knock-down argument,'" Alice said.

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said . . . "it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less."

Toni Morrison uses words in unique and unusually imaginative ways, but, unlike Humpty Dumpty, she always uses them accurately.

But aside from a few negative criticisms, such as the foregoing, the article offers far more that is commendable. Most important is the author's ability to reach right to the core of meaning for each of the four novels and to delineate that meaning succinctly and clearly (though I think she may be a little less successful in dealing with *Tar Baby* than with the other three). The range of subject in Myers's article and the number of significant and perceptive observations is impressive.

—Richard L. Herrnstadt
Iowa State University

The Editor Notes . . .

"Haudenosaunee," you say? "And how do you spell that?" I asked. That was my response to Thadodahho at Onondaga in the summer of 1983 as he raised my consciousness about the name Iroquois as used by the French and the name Haudenosaunee as the People name themselves.

Kristin Herzog agreed that using Haudenosaunee is the progressive way of dealing with her subject, and the connection between her paper and the other two is clearly established. The essence of their contributions is about the power of language to control perceptions of reality (however it is defined).

Language, as Linda M. C. Abbott and Linda Buck Myers show, can be used for either liberation or domestication. Few people, however, realize that the Bishop of Avila, who interpreted the first compilation of a modern European language in 1492 — a Castilian grammar—to Queen Isabella said that "language is the perfect instrument of empire." And since that time, it has been used more often to oppress than to liberate. Each author in this issue shows how language can be used to give voice in the struggle for liberation, nonetheless.

In the fall of 1983 issue of *Ethnic Forum*, *Explorations in Ethnic Studies* was recognized as providing "A useful and lively forum for 'launching' ideas and for the exchange of views." The editorial committee appreciates the vote of confidence extended by *Ethnic Forum*, and we hope that more members will become public referees (as we call those who provide critiques for articles).

Although *Explorations* . . . remains healthy as the contributors to this issue attest, the editor notes with sadness the demise of *Minority Voices* during the past year; its existence was one of the reasons that we decided not to include poetry in NAIES publications. The publishers of *Minority Voices* were forced to discontinue the journal because of their inability to maintain operating costs. The editorial staff of NAIES publications laments the loss of that important voice in the struggle to inform the nation about alternative perspectives to the accepted system of symbols.

Charles C. Irby

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Notes for Contributors

Explorations in Ethnic Studies is a multidisciplinary, nonspecialized journal devoted to the study of ethnicity, ethnic groups, intergroup relations, methodological considerations, theoretical concerns, and the cultural life of ethnic minorities. *Explorations* is a forum for the exchange of ideas.

The editorial staff welcomes manuscripts that demonstrate an integration of theory and practice; the staff is equally interested in receiving manuscripts which are exploratory in nature. Contributors should note carefully the following procedures for submissions.

- A. Manuscripts must be typewritten, double-spaced (including notes) and are not to exceed twenty pages (including notes).
- B. *Explorations* publishes neither bibliographies nor reference lists with articles.
- C. Notes must conform to the following pattern:

Book	¹ Tomás Rivera. <i>Y No Se Lo Tragó La Tierra</i> . (Berkeley: Justa, 1977) 55.
Journal Article	² Orlin Malicher. "A Role for Social Workers in the Consumer Movement." <i>Social Work</i> , Vol. 18, No. 1 (January, 1973) 65-66.
Newsletter Article	³ James H. Williams. "Ethnicity and Human Rights: Raising the National Consciousness." <i>NAIES Newsletter</i> , Vol. 5, No. 2 (October, 1980) 19.
Newspaper Article	⁴ Jack Slater. "Where Are the Blacks in Ballet?" <i>Los Angeles Times</i> , (June 8, 1980) 18.
Article in a Book	⁵ Lawrence Kohlberg. "Stage and Sequence: The Cognitive-Developmental Approach to Socialization." <i>Handbook of Socialization</i> , D. Goslin, ed. (New York: Rand McNally, 1969) 347-580.
Thesis/Dissertation	⁶ Michael G. Karni. "Yhteishyry"—or For the Common Good: Finnish Radicalism in the Western Great Lakes Region 1900-1940. Ph.D. Dissertation. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1975) 115-195.
Multiple Authors	⁷ A.K. Bahn, E.A. Gardner, L. Alltop, G.L. Knatterud, and M. Solomon. "Admissions and Prevalence Rates for Psychiatric Facilities in Four Register Areas." <i>American Journal of Public Health</i> , Vol. 56, No. 12 (December, 1966) 2033-2051.
Subsequent References	⁸ Ibid. (follows immediately) ⁹ Williams, 20. (otherwise)
Additionally	¹⁰ Informational notes are acceptable.

- D. Submit four copies of manuscript with author name(s) appearing on a separate page.
- E. Manuscripts received without a self-addressed, stamped envelope will not be returned.

All submissions for *Explorations in Ethnic Studies* are refereed by two or more persons, and it usually takes two months for the readers' reports.

Submit all materials to:

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